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MARVEL PREVIEW

MOON KNIGHT™

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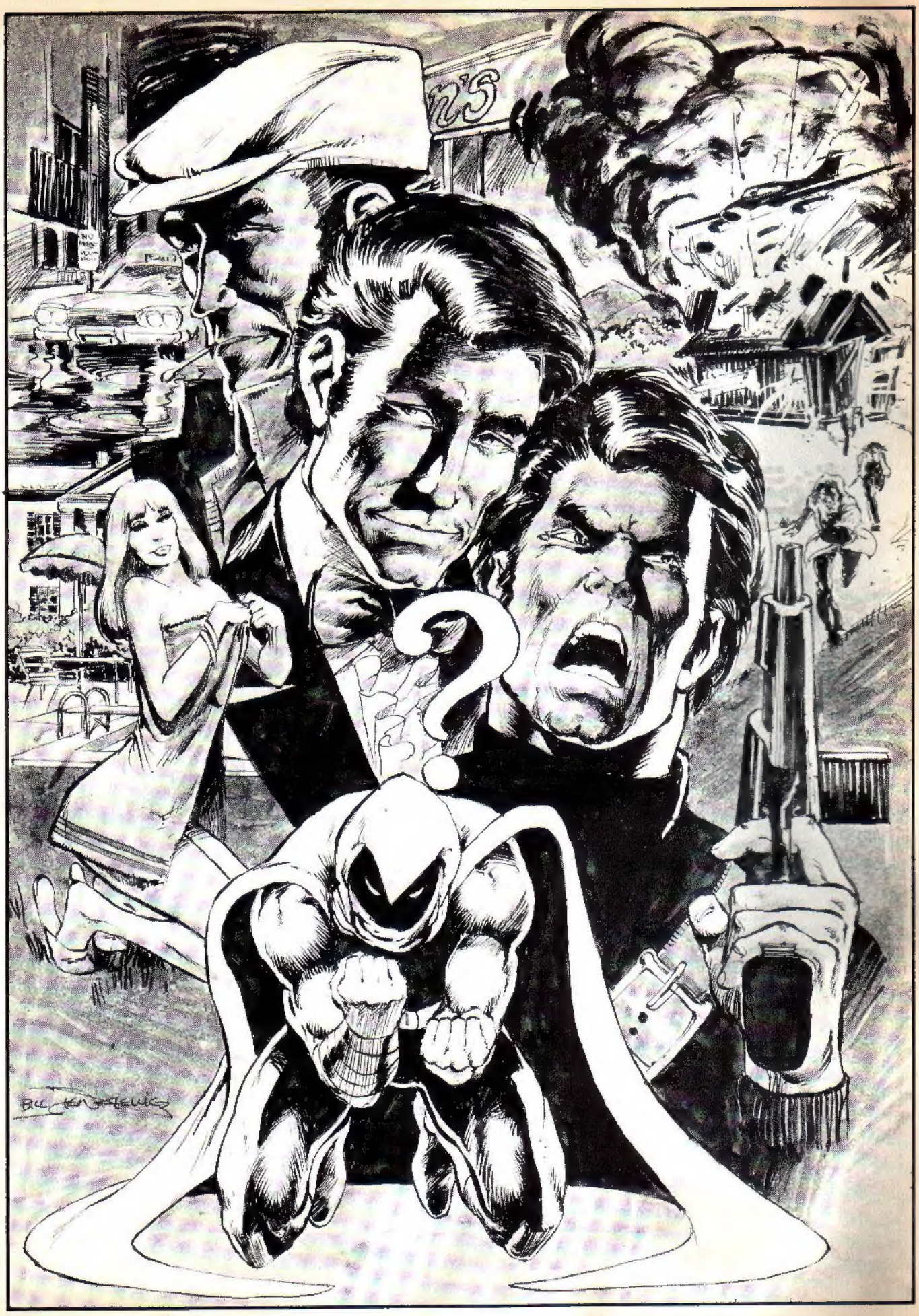
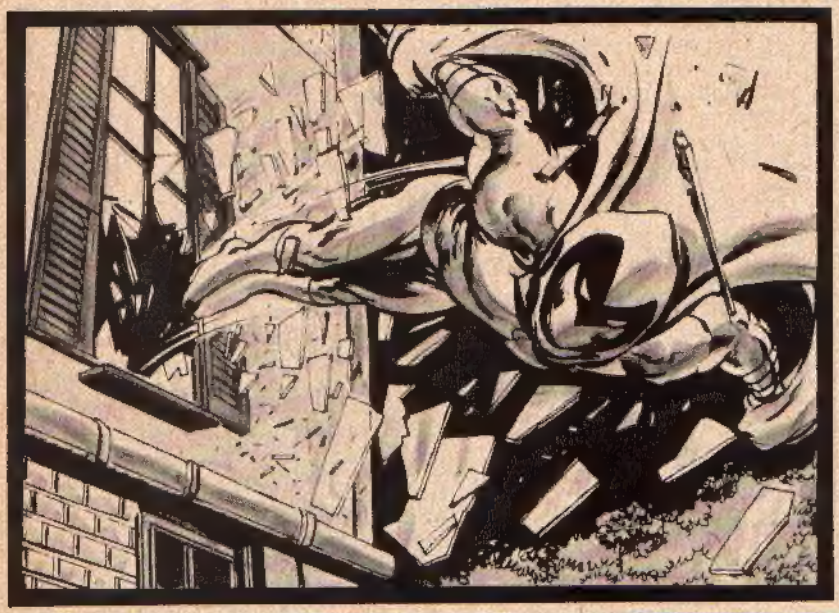
PLUS: THE SHROUD



STAN LEE presents:
MARVEL PREVIEW
MOON KNIGHT



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FULL PHASE

Where Moon Knight's concerned, I feel like a father — or at least an uncle. No, I didn't create him (Doug Moench and Don Perlin did) or co-create him, or anything like that. But I've watched him grow, and been a strong part of his growth process over the past couple of years.

Strangely enough, when MK made his debut as a "villain" in the pages of WEREWOLF BY NIGHT, back in 1975, I paid no attention. It wasn't until a year or so later, when the silvery sleuth made a two issue run in our tryout title, MARVEL SPOTLIGHT, that I suddenly sat up and took notice. Like most fans, I'd mentally toyed with the idea of extrapolating various characters' destinies as if I had editorial control of their lives. I, naturally, did the same with Moon Knight when I'd finished SPOTLIGHTs #28 & 29. Unfortunately, (for me, at any rate) such tampering ended at the suggestion box.

During the intervening several years, MK began popping up in various Marvel mags as a guest-star, and I began popping up at Marvel, where somebody had lost their senses and hired me as an editorial assistant. Along about 1978, under Special Projects Editor Rick Marschall, I was looking around for a back-up series for our process color HULK magazine. Several thoughts drifted through my head: I wanted a secondary character who was radically different from the Hulk (to help attract readers who might not normally pick up ol' Greenskin's adventures), and I wanted a concept which had not been fully mined of its potential. After mulling over a revised Shanna the She-Devil series, or a revitalized Sub-Mariner strip, I settled on the crescent crusader himself, Moon Knight, because I felt he fit the bill nicely. Now all I had to do was convince boss Rick Marschall and head honcho Jim Shooter. Once they gave me the okay, the rest was the proverbial piece-o'-cake. Writer Doug Moench suggested doing a several part serial, in which he'd highlight each of MK's other identities: cab driver Jake Lockley, millionaire Steve Grant, and mercenary Marc Spector.

After the first fantastic installment had been penned by Doug Moench and rendered by Gene Colan, I perused it several times and then called Doug to suggest some changes. I'd decided that I wanted a bizarre, outrageous villain to be behind all the machinations in the first part. The irrepressible Mr Moench grumbled a bit, but said he'd come up with something ingenius. And, of course, he did.

Just to break from the business at hand for a moment, I wanted to slip in an aside about Doug. I really can't praise the talented guy enough. In so many ways Doug's been the creative backbone of the offset department, from his days on DOC SAVAGE, to his current triumph on WEIRDWORLD. But I digress...

After we'd gotten a firm handle on the series' direction, I made what I feel was my most important contribution to the Moon Knight mythos — his cape modification. I admit it, I've always been a sucker for large, dramatic capes. Look, if you're going to be super-heroic, you have to look the part, and that includes a flamboyant outfit, the more colorful, the better. When I looked at Moonie's glider cape, I was less than satisfied, despite its admittedly functional configuration. No, I wanted something that would go beyond function, that would enhance the mysterious image we were crafting for MK. After huddling with two of Marvel's most talented titans, Paty Greer and Mark Gruenwald, we came up with the billowing crescent-shaped cape our cuddly creature-of-the-night currently sports.

I was happy. The character was now looking and behaving as Doug and I had intended. All we needed was a steady artist.

Occasionally, in this crazy business, you work on a project and come to believe it's charmed. When Bill Sienkiewicz walked into the Special Projects office with this exceptional portfolio of pencil and ink magic, I knew MK was such an endeavor. At the risk of trotting out a cliche, Bill was *exactly* the kind of artist I was looking for. His Moon Knight has a menacing, almost supernatural aspect, heightened by the many wonders Bill's worked with that great, flowing cape. Now I had the team I'd dreamed about, producing the type of material I knew was right for this series.

And then things — big things — started happening. When Editor Rick Marschall returned from the prestigious Luca Convention in Italy, he mentioned that of all the items he was approached about, the one which the Italians seems most interested in was Moon Knight. A few weeks later, Marvel's gifted Gail Munn, our lovely lady in charge of overseas promotion, informed us that quite a few European comics publishers wanted to reprint MK's adventures in album format, on high quality paper. And then came the final topper, from Marvel's Far East correspondent, Gene Pelc, who said the Japanese were going to do Moon Knight as a regular live action television show.

And on and on it went.

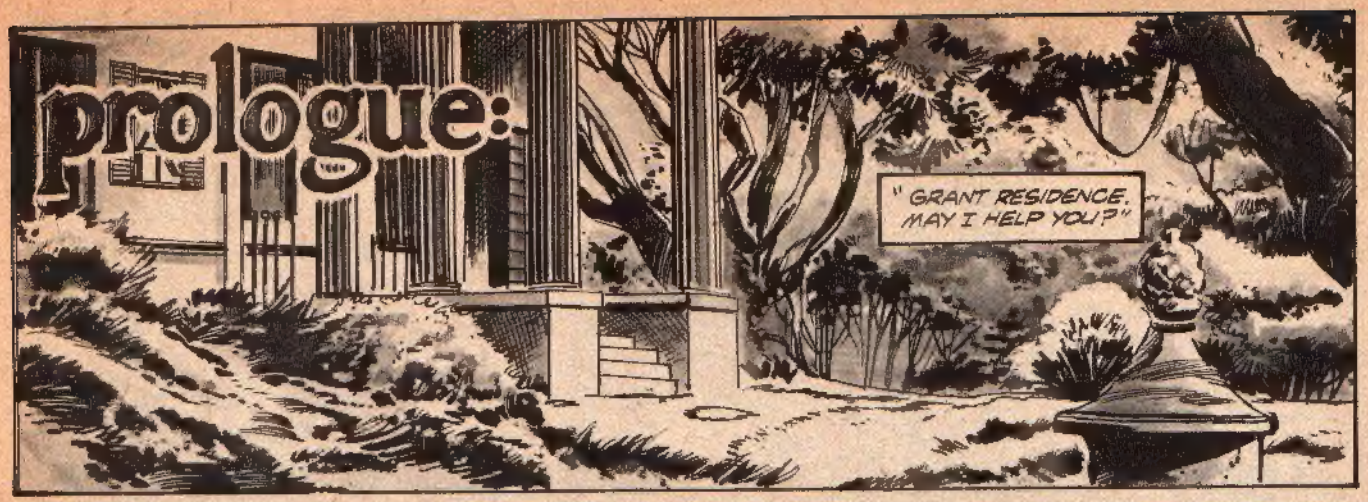
Somehow, with all the preceding being true, it seems strange to be writing an editorial farewell. Yet, that's what this is, because MK will soon be vacating his berth in THE HULK magazine and swinging off into a whole new series of spine-tingling tales in his very own monthly color comic!

And that brings us full circle — or full phase, if you'll permit me just one astronomical analogy. You see, once again, I'll be merely a Moon Knight watcher, which is really why I feel a bit like a father. I've taken part in raising this guy from guest-star to super-star. Now I'm watching him go off on his own as I knew he one day would, fully prepared to face the tough world of fickle newsstand sales and distribution. I've a lot of confidence in him, so it's with no tears I watch him depart.

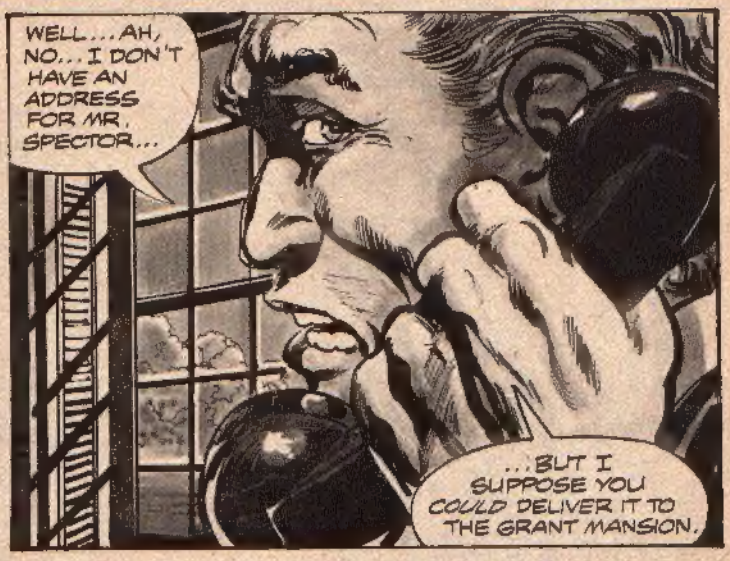
Finally, lest I've mistakenly given you the impression that this has been a one-man act, or even a duet — forget it. All along the way, innumerable fine talents have contributed to this series, and most rewarding for me... grown with it. I'm speaking of people like Bill Sienkiewicz and Steve Oliff, who cut their professional eyeteeth on MK, and (along with several superb inkers) gave us the visually definitive interpretation of MK. I've received tremendous support and encouragement from my editors, Rick Marschall, Lynn Graeme, and Jim Shooter, all of whom gave me the nod and said "Go to it, kid." And I've been equally uplifted by such lettering luminaries as Jim Novak, who always asked to letter Moon Knight because he just plain liked the strip so much. Of course, a round of applause for Doug Moench, too, as if I had to tell you why.

With the conclusion of "Mind Thieves," I move out of the editorial driver's seat and slip over to the passenger side. Soon, the very capable team of Denny O'Neil and Mark Gruenwald will be taking the wheel. And that's fine by me, because I've a hunch there'll be lots of company coming along for the ride, as we all head happily off into the monthly moon night.

——Ralph Macchio


prologue:
" GRANT RESIDENCE. MAY I HELP YOU?"

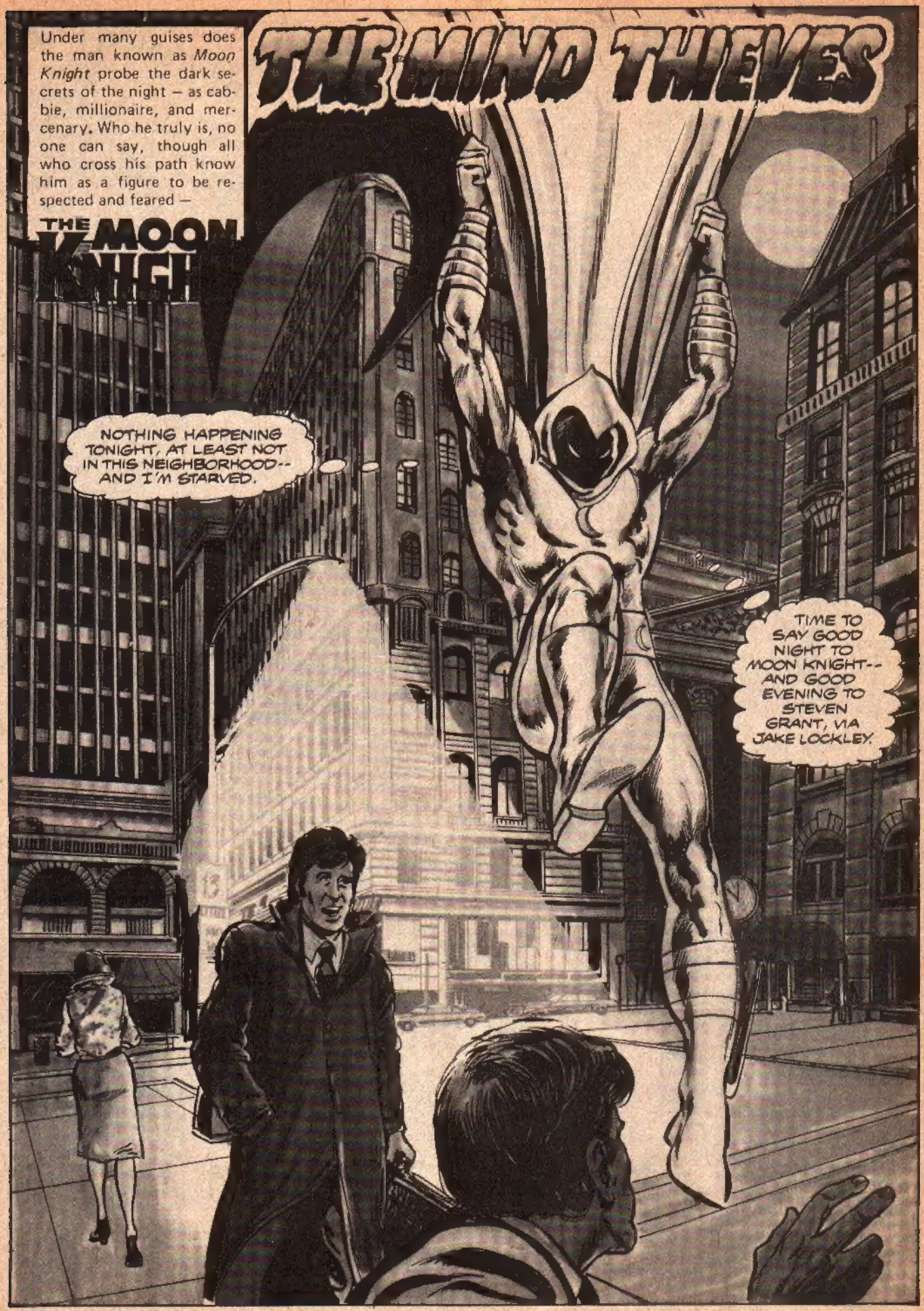
UH... YES, THIS IS ALSO MARC SPECTOR'S ANSWERING SERVICE. MAY I TAKE A MESSAGE?
I SEE... A DELIVERY FOR MR. SPECTOR, YOU SAY?


WELL... AH, NO... I DON'T HAVE AN ADDRESS FOR MR. SPECTOR...
...BUT I SUPPOSE YOU COULD DELIVER IT TO THE GRANT MANSION.

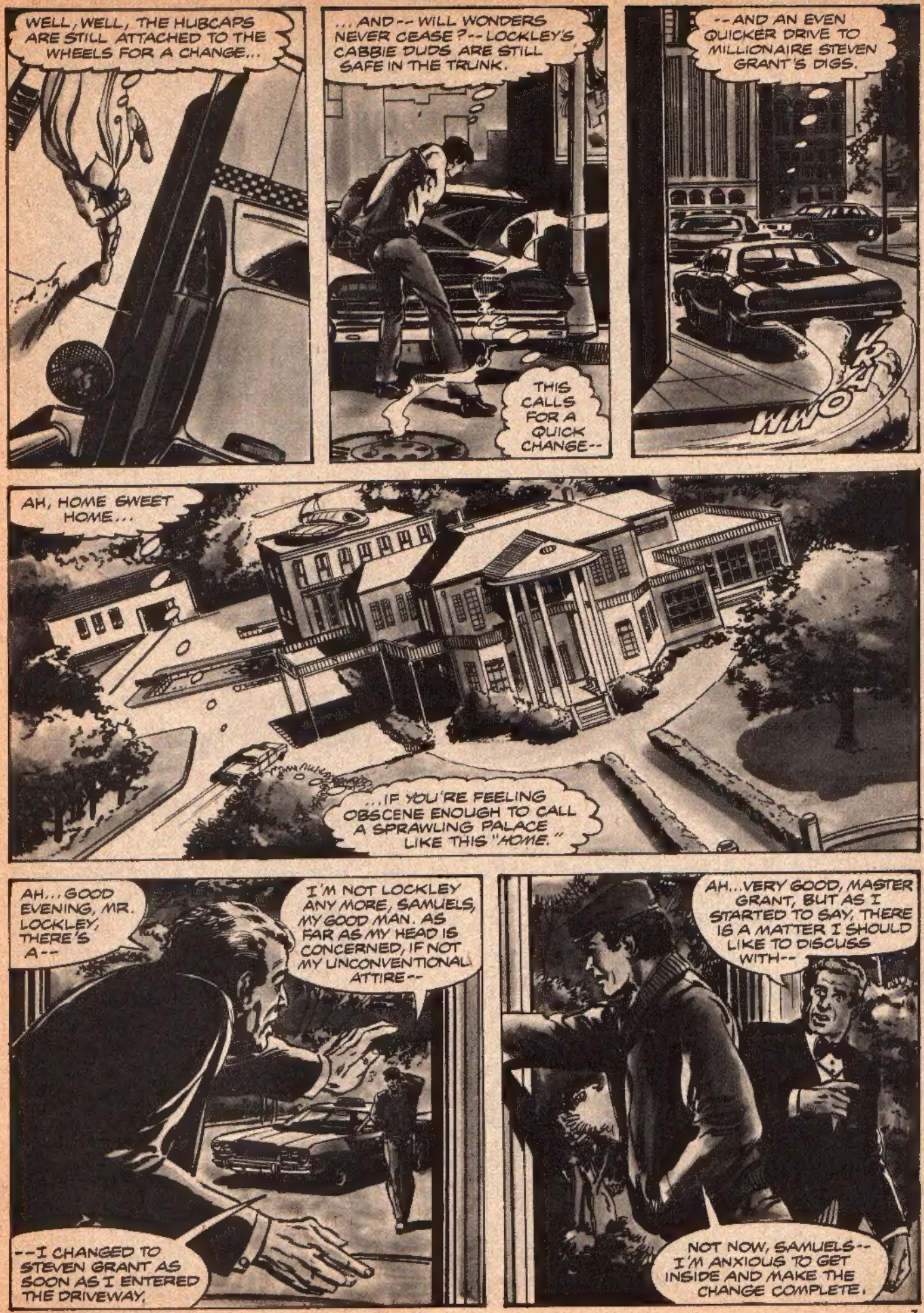
THAT'S WHERE MR. SPECTOR MOST FREQUENTLY COLLECTS HIS MAIL. THE NEXT TIME?
WELL, ACTUALLY, THEY-- UH, HE-- I MEAN, WE ARE EXPECTING HIM AT THE GRANT MANSION TONIGHT.

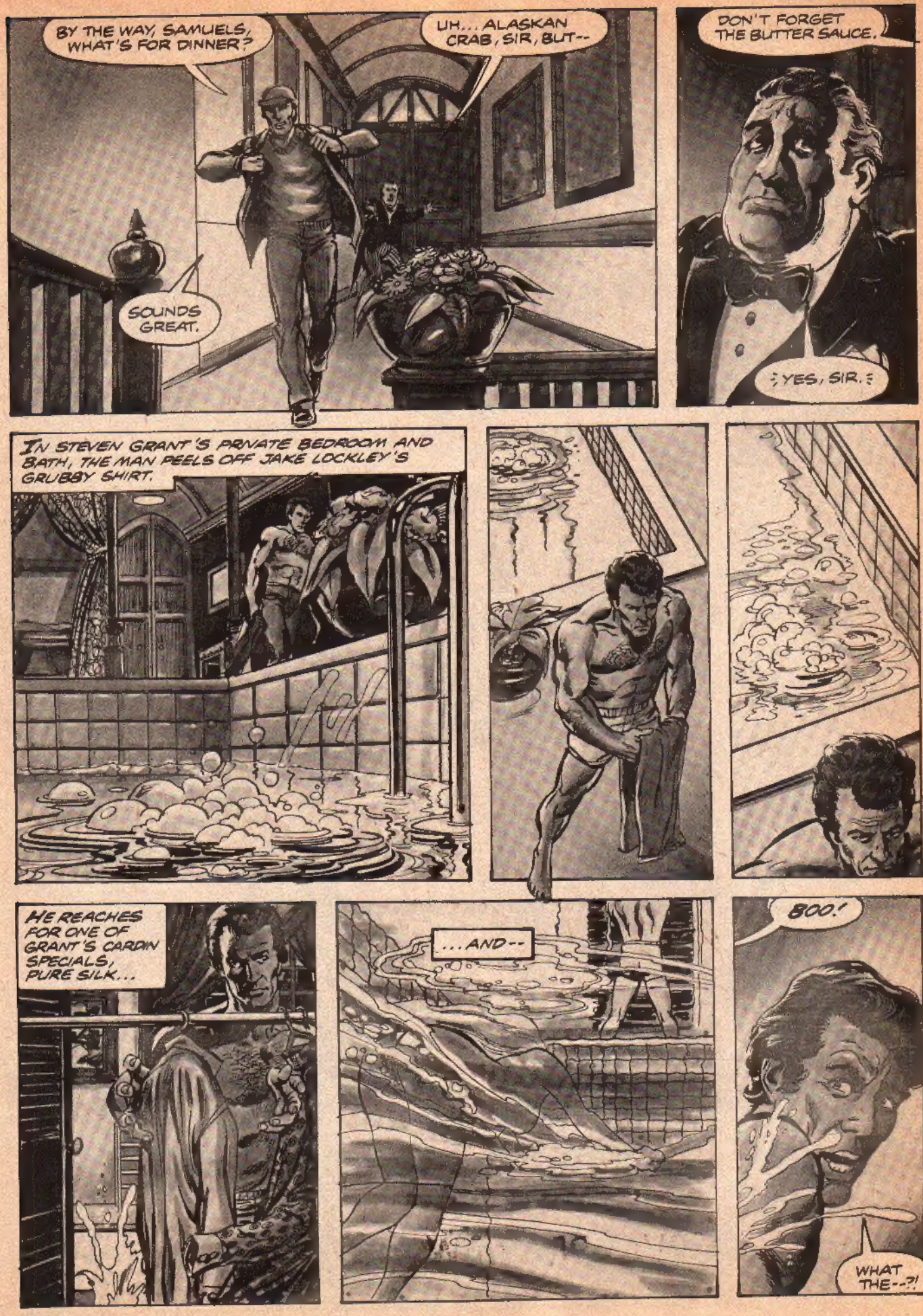
YES... YES. VERY WELL...
I SHALL EXPECT THE DELIVERY TRUCK LATER TODAY. YES, GOODBYE.

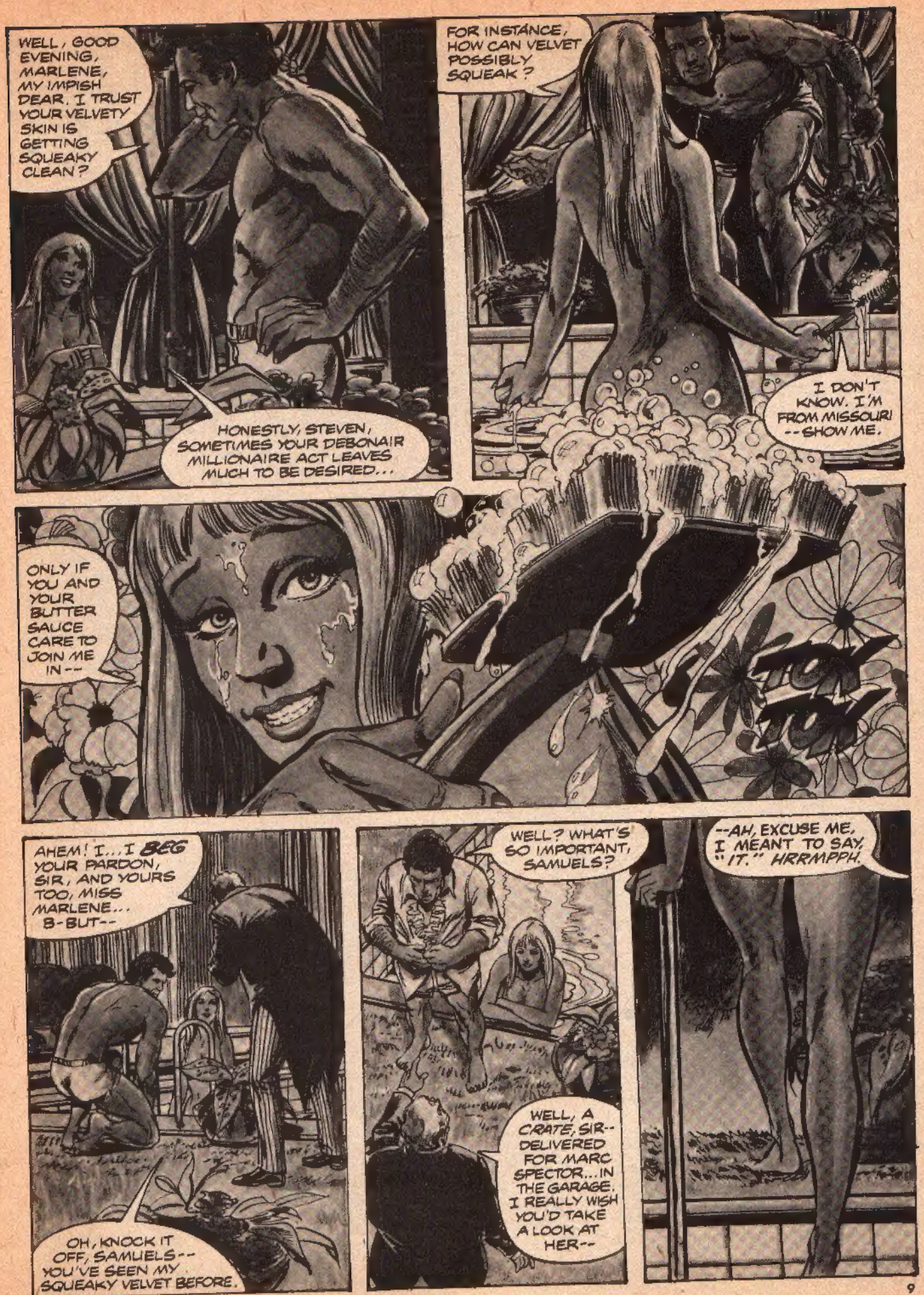
NOW I WONDER WHAT SORT OF GIFT ANYONE WOULD SEND TO SOMEONE LIKE MARC SPECTOR... HMMM--

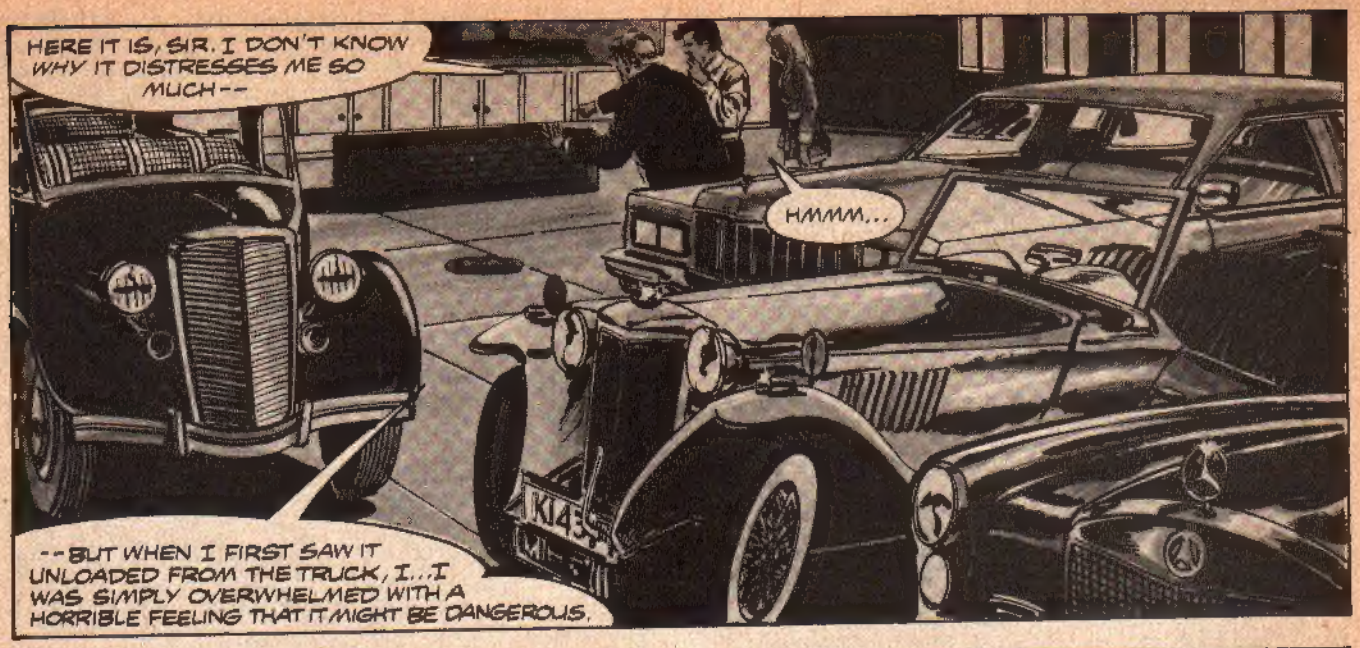

Under many guises does the man known as *Moon Knight* probe the dark secrets of the night – as cabbie, millionaire, and mercenary. Who he truly is, no one can say, though all who cross his path know him as a figure to be respected and feared –
THE MOON KNIGHT
THE MIND THIEVES
NOTHING HAPPENING TONIGHT, AT LEAST NOT IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD-- AND I'M STARVED.
TIME TO SAY GOOD NIGHT TO MOON KNIGHT-- AND GOOD EVENING TO STEVEN GRANT, VIA JAKE LOCKLEY.

 Script: DOUG MOENCH Art: BILL SIENKIEWICZ & TOM PALMER Add'l Inking: B. SIENKIEWICZ & D. GREEN


WELL, WELL, THE HUBCAPS ARE STILL ATTACHED TO THE WHEELS FOR A CHANGE...
...AND -- WILL WONDERS NEVER CEASE? -- LOCKLEY'S CABBIE DUDS ARE STILL SAFE IN THE TRUNK.
THIS CALLS FOR A QUICK CHANGE--
--AND AN EVEN QUICKER DRIVE TO MILLIONAIRE STEVEN GRANT'S DIGS.
WHO?
AH, HOME SWEET HOME...
...IF YOU'RE FEELING OBSCENE ENOUGH TO CALL A SPRAWLING PALACE LIKE THIS "HOME."
AH... GOOD EVENING, MR. LOCKLEY, THERE'S A--
I'M NOT LOCKLEY ANY MORE, SAMUELS, MY GOOD MAN. AS FAR AS MY HEAD IS CONCERNED, IF NOT MY UNCONVENTIONAL ATTIRE--
--I CHANGED TO STEVEN GRANT AS SOON AS I ENTERED THE DRIVEWAY.
AH...VERY GOOD, MASTER GRANT, BUT AS I STARTED TO SAY, THERE IS A MATTER I SHOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS WITH--
NOT NOW, SAMUELS -- I'M ANXIOUS TO GET INSIDE AND MAKE THE CHANGE COMPLETE.


BY THE WAY, SAMUELS, WHAT'S FOR DINNER?
UH... ALASKAN CRAB, SIR, BUT--
SOUNDS GREAT.
DON'T FORGET THE BUTTER SAUCE.
;YES, SIR.;
IN STEVEN GRANT'S PRIVATE BEDROOM AND BATH, THE MAN PEELS OFF JAKE LOCKLEY'S GRUBBY SHIRT.
HE REACHES FOR ONE OF GRANT'S CARDIN SPECIALS, PURE SILK...
...AND--
BOO!
WHAT THE--?!


WELL, GOOD EVENING, MARLENE, MY IMPISH DEAR. I TRUST YOUR VELVETY SKIN IS GETTING SQUEAKY CLEAN?
HONESTLY, STEVEN, SOMETIMES YOUR DEBONAIR MILLIONAIRE ACT LEAVES MUCH TO BE DESIRED...
FOR INSTANCE, HOW CAN VELVET POSSIBLY SQUEAK?
I DON'T KNOW. I'M FROM MISSOURI --SHOW ME.
ONLY IF YOU AND YOUR BUTTER SAUCE CARE TO JOIN ME IN--
TOK TOK
AHEM! I...I BEG YOUR PARDON, SIR, AND YOURS TOO, MISS MARLENE... B-BUT--
OH, KNOCK IT OFF, SAMUELS-- YOU'VE SEEN MY SQUEAKY VELVET BEFORE.
WELL? WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT, SAMUELS?
WELL, A CRATE, SIR-- DELIVERED FOR MARC SPECTOR... IN THE GARAGE. I REALLY WISH YOU'D TAKE A LOOK AT HER--
--AH, EXCUSE ME, I MEANT TO SAY, "IT." HRRMPPH.


HERE IT IS, SIR. I DON'T KNOW WHY IT DISTRESSES ME SO MUCH--
HMMM...
--BUT WHEN I FIRST SAW IT UNLOADED FROM THE TRUCK, I..I WAS SIMPLY OVERWHELMED WITH A HORRIBLE FEELING THAT IT MIGHT BE DANGEROUS.

YOU MIGHT BE RIGHT, SAMUELS...
MARC SPECTOR
MANIPULATEUR AVEUGLE

FRENCHIE--YOU UP THERE ON THE ROOF?

OUI, MARC--TUNING UP ZEE CHOPPER.

PUT IT ASIDE AND COME ON DOWN TO THE CAR GARAGE. BRING YOUR TOOLS--WE MAY HAVE A BOMB DOWN HERE.
AT ONCE, MARC.

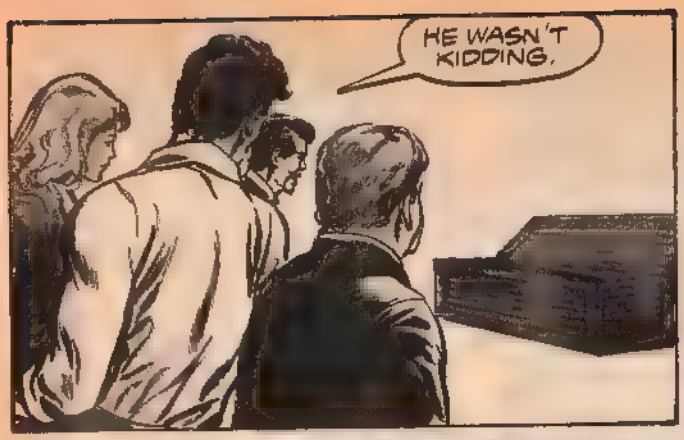
AND SOON, IN THE GARAGE...
NO TICKING... BUT ZERE IS ZEE ODOR...

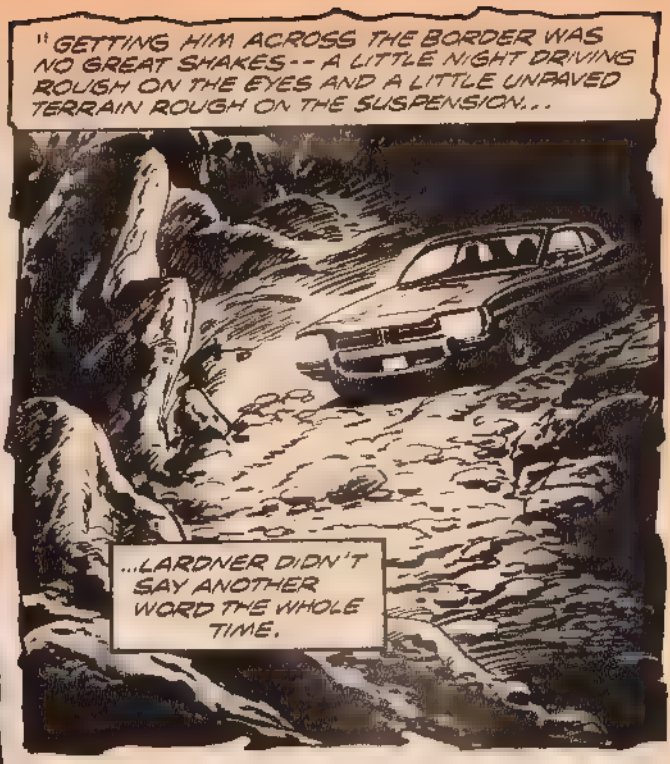
YOU'RE RIGHT, FRENCHIE--I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST THE GARAGE SMELLS, BUT NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, IT DOES SMELL LIKE--
YES, AND THE BOX LOOKS LIKE--

OPEN IT, FRENCHIE.

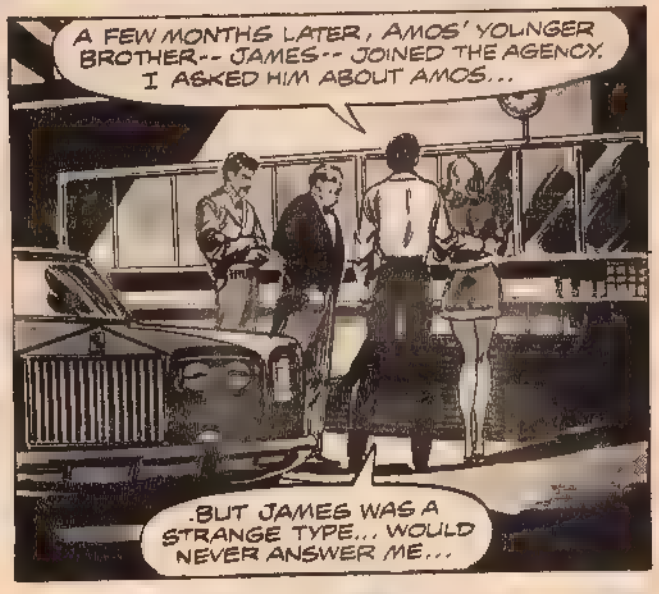
IT IS A COFFIN.
GOOD LORD! I KNEW IT--WHAT A FRIGHT!
BUT... BUT WHO IS IT?
THAT'S THE FIRST GOOD QUESTION. THE SECOND IS. WHY WAS T SENT TO MARC SPECTOR?
AND THE THIRD GOOD QUESTION IS. WHO SENT T TO YOJ?
THE MARKING, FRENCHIE-- "MANIPULER AVEC SOIN" --IF I REMEMBER MY FRENCH, IT MEANS--
OUI, MARC-- 'HANDLE WITH CARE." A MACABRE JEST?
PERHAPS MORE THAN A JOKE...
YOU MEAN, WHOEVER SENT IT IS FROM FRANCE?
MAYBE, AND MAYBE FROM... MONTREAL. AS MARC SPECTOR I SPENT A GOOD TWO YEARS WORKING FOR THE "COMPANY" AND...
YES! THE FACE IS BADLY BATTERED, BUT I RECOGNIZE HIM NOW...
THIS IS AMOS LARDNER! HE ALSO WORKED FOR THE AGENCY-- UNTIL HE TOOK A TRIP TO MONTREAL.

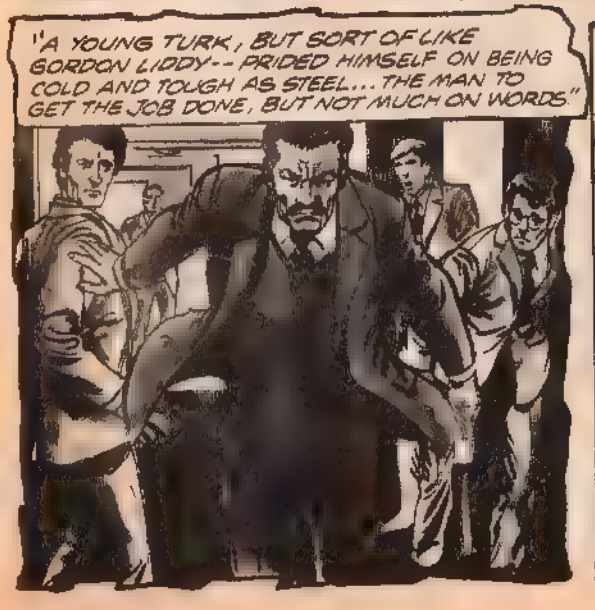
THE COMPANY DOESN'T ENCOURAGE WORKBUDDIES, BUT LARDNER AND I WERE THE EXCEPTIONS. WE RESPECTED EACH OTHER'S MOVES, TRUSTED EACH OTHER. THAT WAS A RARE COMMODITY--AND IT'STILL IS.
"WE PLAYED IT LOOSE WHEN WE WERE TOGETHER...
ALL QUIET ON THE RUSSIAN FRONT, AMOS.
RUSSIAN EMBASSY
YEAH, WISH THEY'D SEND OUT SOME VODKA AND CAVIAR FOR US.
"... AND WHEN WE GOT BACK TOGETHER AT LANGLEY AFTER SEPARATE ASSIGNMENTS, WE DIDN'T THINK MUCH OF BREAKING THE SECRECY TABOO.
YOU WERE GONE A LONG TIME, MARC. TOP SECRET?
YEAH.
SO FILL ME IN.
"THEN, ABOUT THREE YEARS BACK, WELL BEFORE MOON KNIGHT WAS 'BORN', LARDNER ASKED ME TO BE HIS DRIVER ON A MYSTERIOUS ASSIGNMENT
GONNA BE GONE FOR SOME TIME, AMOS?
CAN'T SAY.
"IT WAS THE FIRST TIME HE'D EVER GIVEN ME A TIGHT LIP.
"ALL HE'D SAY WAS THAT I WAS TO SMUGGLE HIM ACROSS THE CANADIAN BORDER TO A PLACE CALLED RAVENCRAG IN MONTREAL...
SO FILL ME IN.
LOOK, MARC, MOST OF THE TIME THE COMPANY'S RULES DON'T MEAN A THING--BUT NOT THIS TIME. DESPITE THE PETTY CRAP...
...WE BOTH BELIEVE THE COMPANY'S NECESSARY--THE COUNTRY'S SECURITY IS LEGITIMATELY THREATENED FROM TIME TO TIME.
YEAH...?
YEAH. AND FOR ONCE I'M GOING TO PLAY IT BY THE BOOK.
THIS IS THE BIGGEST THING I'VE EVER BEEN INVOLVED IN.

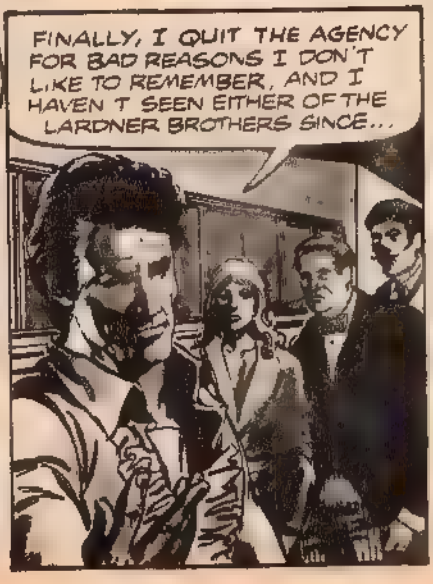

HE WASN'T KIDDING.


"GETTING HIM ACROSS THE BORDER WAS NO GREAT SHAKES -- A LITTLE NIGHT DRIVING ROUGH ON THE EYES AND A LITTLE UNPAVED TERRAIN ROUGH ON THE SUSPENSION...
...LARDNER DIDN'T SAY ANOTHER WORD THE WHOLE TIME.

"FINALLY, WHEN WE ARRIVED IN MONTREAL, HE DID SAY SOMETHING...
GOODBYE, MARC -- AND THANKS.
'THEN HE WENT UP THE HILL TO RAVECRAG AND I NEVER SAW HIM AGAIN."


A FEW MONTHS LATER, AMOS' YOUNGER BROTHER -- JAMES -- JOINED THE AGENCY. I ASKED HIM ABOUT AMOS...
BUT JAMES WAS A STRANGE TYPE... WOULD NEVER ANSWER ME...


"A YOUNG TURK, BUT SORT OF LIKE GORDON LIDDY -- PRIDED HIMSELF ON BEING COLD AND TOUGH AS STEEL... THE MAN TO GET THE JOB DONE, BUT NOT MUCH ON WORDS."


FINALLY, I QUIT THE AGENCY FOR BAD REASONS I DON'T LIKE TO REMEMBER, AND I HAVEN'T SEEN EITHER OF THE LARDNER BROTHERS SINCE...

...UNTIL NOW, ANYWAY.
SKREEECH

WHAT WAS THAT? DID YOU HEAR IT--?
ZEE FRONT OF ZEE MANSION, MARC! AN INCENDIARY GRENADE!
YES... THERE GOES THE CRAB.
NOT TO MENTION THE GETAWAY CAR.
YOU MAKE ZEE JOKE, MARC? WHAT IS ZIS "CRAB"?
NOTHING, FRENCHIE. BUT IT SEEMS SOMEONE DOESN'T CARE FOR MARC SPECTOR VERY MUCH PUT OUT THE FIRE, SAMUELS.
SPECTOR'S BEING ATTACKED, BUT GRANT'S MANSION IS TAKING ALL THE LUMPS. YOU'D BETTER BE FINISHED WITH THAT TUNEUP ON THE CHOPPER, FRENCHIE--
--BECAUSE MARC SPECTOR AND MOON KNIGHT ARE BLASTING OFF FOR RAVENCRAG.

LISTEN TO ME, MARLENE -- SPECTOR AND AMOS LARDNER ONCE WORKED TOGETHER ON A CERTAIN TOP-SECRET OPERATION I WANT YOU TO LOOK THROUGH SPECTOR'S OLD FILES FOR EVERYTHING MARKED OPERATION COBRA.
GOT IT.
BUT ONE QUESTION FIRST: JUST WHO ARE YOU, STEVEN?
SOMETIMES I'M NOT SURE I KNOW.
DO YOU EVER KNOW?
I,,,DON'T KNOW.
TWO HOURS LATER, WITH THE FIRE UNDER CONTROL...
DON'T YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ZIS RAVENCRAG, MARC?
ONLY THAT IT'S AN INSTITUTION, FRENCHIE, WHICH IS A POLITE WAY OF SAYING IT'S AN INSANE ASYLUM. BUT WHAT IT REALLY IS, IS A COMPANY FRONT.
WAKE ME WHEN WE GET THERE.
OUI, MARC. PLEASANT DREAMS.
HOURS LATER, THE BIZARRE CHOPPER BREAKS THE CANADIAN BORDER LOW, TO AVOID POSSIBLE RADAR.
PARANOIA, HAVING BEEN JUSTIFIED MORE THAN ONCE IN THE PAST, RUNS DEEP.
SOON...
WAKE UP, MARC. WE ARE HERE -- AND IT IS ALMOST ZEE DAWN.
RAVENCRAG BROODS BELOW.

OKAY, FRENCHIE, SET HER DOWN NEARBY AND WAIT FOR ME...
MOON KNIGHT DROPS THROUGH THE HATCH, SWITCHING TO WHISPERED COMMUNICATION VIA HIS INBUILT COWL-MICROPHONE AND RECEIVER..
SHOULDN'T TAKE ME LONG TO FIND THE RECORDS OFFICE...
GOT MY EYE ON A SUITABLE WINDOW LEDGE NOW.
BINGO, FRENCHIE. NOW TO SEE IF ONE OF MY CRESCENT-DARTS WILL PRY THE LOCK..
GOT IT--AND I'M GONNA SIGN OFF NOW, FRENCHIE. FROM HERE ON IN, I DON'T WANT TO RISK EVEN SUBVOCALS..
NO RECORDS IN HERE.
BUT MAYBE UP AHEAD, PAST THAT BRANCHING CORRIDOR, WHERE--
HANDS PLUNGE FROM THE DARKNESS.

YOU'RE HERE! I KNEW YOU'D COME-- THE WHITE ANGEL HERE TO TAKE US OUT OF THIS EVIL PLACE...!
AN INMATE--IT'S JUST AN INMATE!
DON'T YOU SEE? THIS PLACE IS THE FIRST GATE OF HELL--WAITING TO USHER US DOWN INTO THE FINAL REALM OF BRIM-STONE--
--AND THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN GRANT US SALVATION IS THE WHITE ANGEL--YOU!
WHO THE--?!
GOTTA GET AWAY FROM 'EM-- MAYBE THROUGH THIS DOOR...
GOOD QUESTION.
LET GO OF ME, YOU FOOL! THE TIMER'S SET FOR ONLY FIVE MINUTES!
TIK TIK
TIK TIK TIK
WHO ARE YOU?

TIK
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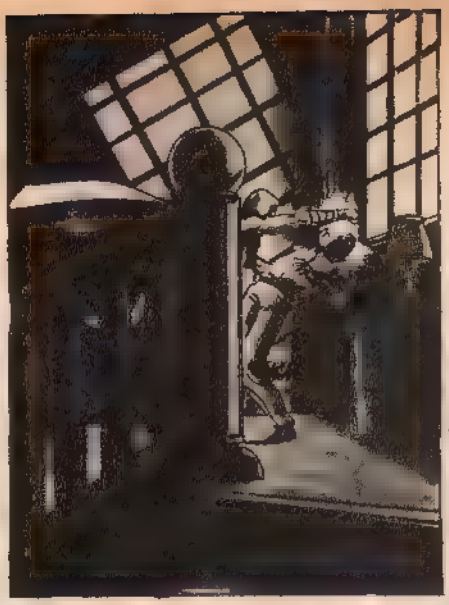

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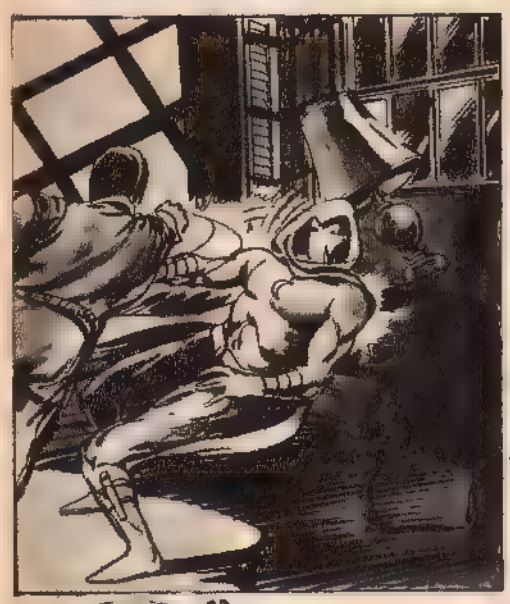

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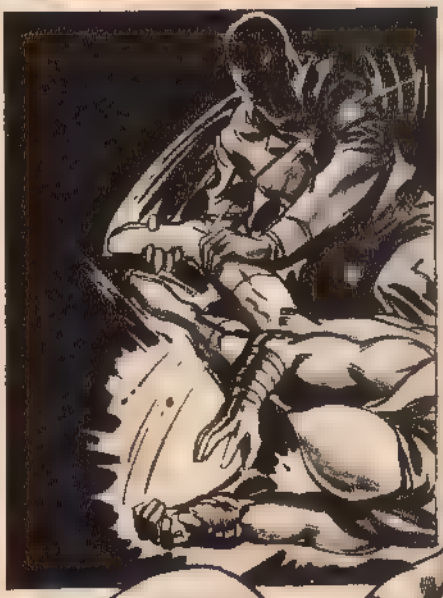

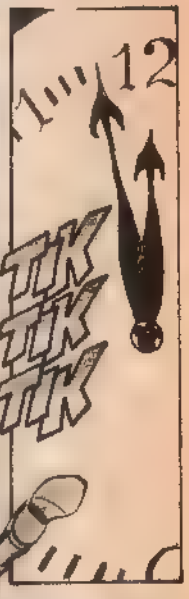
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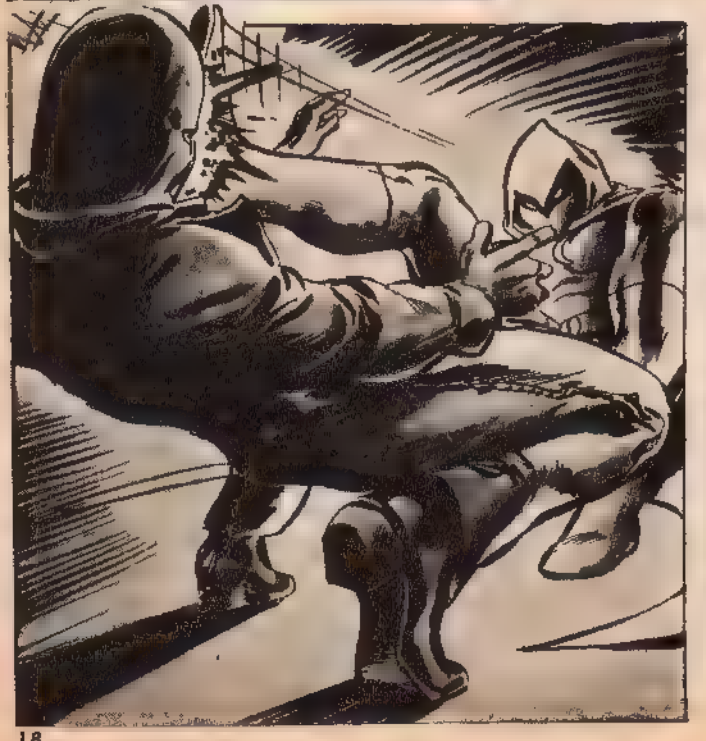

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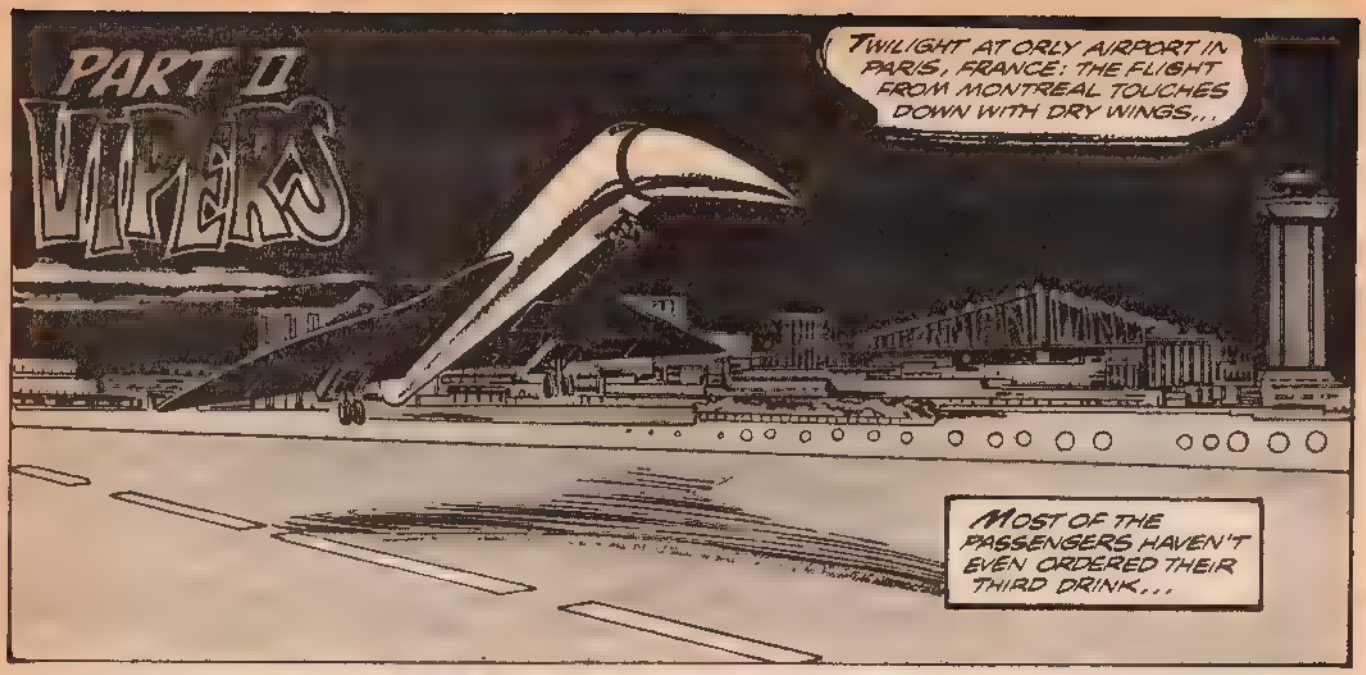
STILL FEELING THE SWEAT, MOON KNIGHT RACES TO THE BALCONY...
THERE HE GOES--TAKING THREE STEPS AT A CLIP. THE CHUMP NOT ONLY THROWS A WHALE OF A PUNCH, BUT HE CAN ALSO MOVE.
BUT THEN, SO CAN I--
--AND NOBODY MOVES QUITE LIKE THE MOON KNIGHT!
REACHING FOR A GUN, EH?
COFF COFF--BLAST!--CHOKE--NOT A GUN...
A...GAS... BOMB!

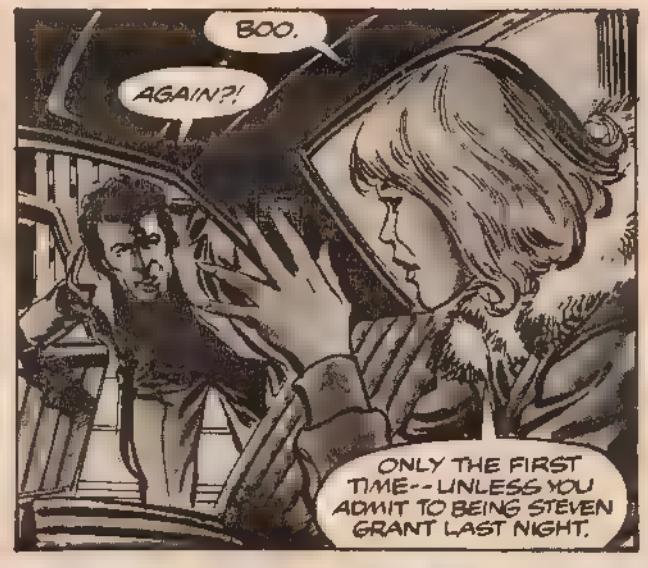
MARC, I HEARD ZEE SOUND! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!
FROM THE PRE-DAWN DARKNESS BEYOND THE TREES, A GUNNING MOTOR AND SQUEALING TIRES.
IT IS A SOUND THEY HAVE HEARD BEFORE
YEAH, I'M OKAY... BUT I LET HIM GET AWAY AGAIN, FRENCHIE... I BLEW IT.
WHO, MARC? ZEE SAME ONE WHO ATTACKED ZEE MANSION?
MOST LIKELY-- IF THE TIME OF A FLIGHT FROM NEW YORK TO MONTREAL CHECKS OUT...
HE MIGHT'VE EVEN HAD TIME TO MAKE IT HERE BY CAR, BUT LET'S JUST GET BACK TO THE CHOPPER.
MARC SPECTOR HAS AN UNANNOUNCED NINE O'CLOCK APPOINTMENT WITH THE DIRECTOR OF THIS JOINT.
DAWN BREAKS, AT LAST, IN THE EAST.
THREE HOURS LATER, AT NINE...
GOOD LORD--MARC SPECTOR! I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU IN YEARS!
THIS IS A SURPRISE FOR ME TOO, HANSON. I WAS EXPECTING LeBLANC.
THEN YOU MUST BE OUT OF TOUCH, MARC. LeBLANC FLED THE COUNTRY WHEN THE HEAT GOT TOO INTENSE, AND EVEN I AM NO LONGER DIRECTLY CONNECTED WITH THE COMPANY.
THIS IS A FULLY LEGITIMATE INSTITUTION NOW.
DO TELL.
YES...ALTHOUGH WE DID HAVE A LITTLE TROUBLE LAST NIGHT--A BROKEN WINDOW--AND APPARENTLY ONE OF THE INMATES COBBLED TOGETHER A TIME BOMB... UNLESS YOU HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT?
ME? NO... BUT YOUR TROUBLE AND MY VISIT JUST MIGHT SHARE SOME COMMON GROUND. TELL ME ABOUT IT.

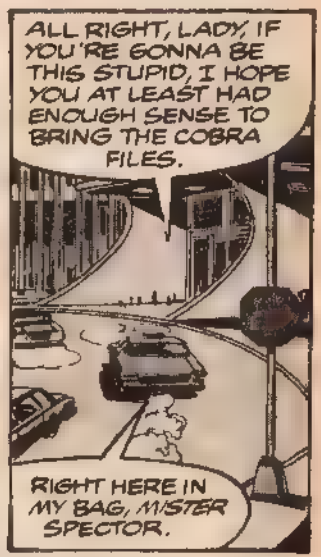
WELL, IT'S NOT COMMON KNOWLEDGE, BUT THE FREEDOM OF INFO ACT HAS MADE IT AVAILABLE. THE COMPANY "MIND-CONTROL" EXPERIMENTS-- HYPNOSIS, DRUGS, SKINNER'S BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION TECHNIQUES, SEX...
...EVEN CRUDE ATTEMPTS AT ELECTRICAL STIMULATION OF THE BRAIN...
YOU KNOW.
YEAH, I KNOW. OPERATION: COBRA.
COBRA WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF IT, MARC. IT GOT OUT OF HAND. SEVERAL OF THE PATIENTS HERE WERE... EXPERIMENTED UPON...WITHOUT THEIR KNOWLEDGE, OR UNDER THE GUISE OF "THERAPY."
IT WAS A BAD SCENE, MARC, AND ONE I'D RATHER NOT REMEMBER. THERE WERE...DEATHS
BUT THERE ARE STILL GOOD MEN IN THE COMPANY, AS NAIVE AS THAT MAY SOUND THESE DAYS.
IT'S JUST THE RENEGADES WHO MUST BE STOPPED.
RENEGADES LIKE LeBLANC? WHERE'D HE GO, HANSON?
THE WORD IS THAT HE'S BACK IN PARIS RESUMING HIS OLD PSYCHIATRY PRACTICE.
YEAH? LET'S HOPE "THE WORD" DOESN'T STINK-- LIKE IT USED TO.
THANKS, HANSON-- I'VE GOT WHAT I NEED KEEP TRYIN' TO CLEAN YOUR NOSE.
THE LIBRARY OF THE GRANT MANSION... THE PHONE RINGS...
YES, STEVEN--THERE'S PLENTY HERE IN THE FILES ABOUT OPERATION' COBRA, ALTHOUGH IT'S ALL PRETTY VAGUE SEEMS TO BE A THEORETICAL PLAN FOR THE COMPANY MIND-CONTROL EXPERIMENTS...

YEAH, I KNOW THAT'S THE MAIN REASON I QUIT THE COMPANY AND WENT BACK TO BEIN' A FREE-LANCE MERCENARY BUT I JUST LEARNED IT WASN'T MERE THEORY, THEY DID IT, USING CRAZY PEOPLE AS GUINEA PIGS.
GIVE ME SOME NAMES.
WELL, STEVEN, THE MAIN ONE THAT KEEPS CROPPING UP--APPARENTLY THE MASTERMIND OF THE OPERATION, ALTHOUGH THIS IS ONLY HINTED--IS CHARLES LeBLANC.
Home REPAIR
Home REPAIR
HMM...DON'T SEEM LIKE IT WAS A BAD FIRE, BUT I BET THEY CAN AFFORD A BIG BILL.
SO LeBLANC WAS THE ONE BEHIND IT ALL ALONG. BOOK ME AN AFTERNOON FLIGHT OUT OF MONTREAL TO PARIS, MARLENE.
WONDERFUL! I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO DO PARIS WITH YOU, STEVEN, SO WE COULD--
YOU AIN'T COMIN', LADY, CUZ I AIN'T STEVEN--I'M SPECTOR NOW, FOR THE DURATION. OVER AND OUT.
DROP ME AT THE MONTREAL AIRPORT, FRENCHIE, THEN TAKE THE CHOPPER BACK HOME AND GET A NIGHT FLIGHT OUTTA NEW YORK. I'LL BE AT THE HOTEL REGINA IN PARIS.
YES, THAT'S RIGHT. . AN AFTERNOON FLIGHT FROM MONTREAL--AND DO YOU HAVE AN EARLIER FLIGHT FROM NEW YORK?
YOU DO?

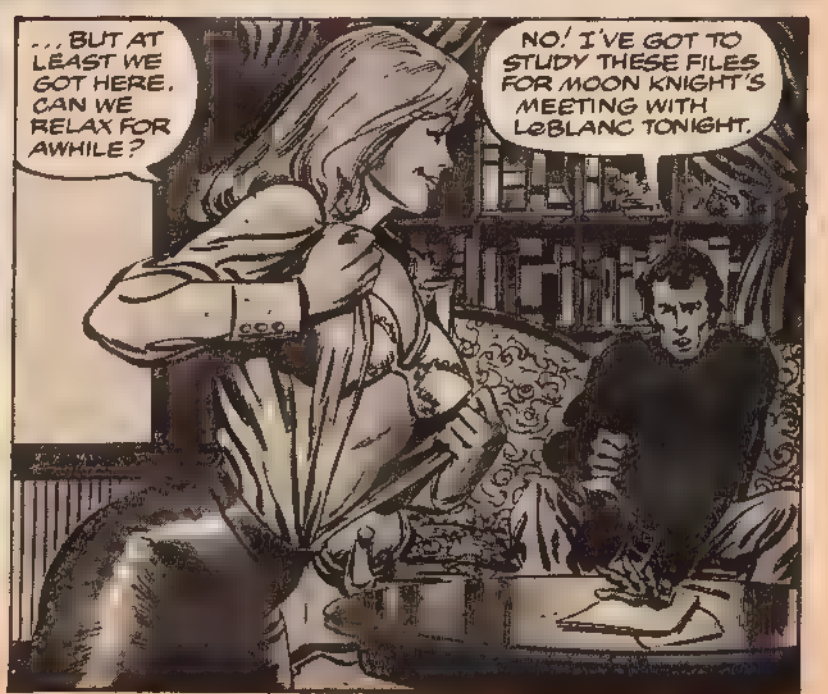

PART II
VIPERS
TWILIGHT AT ORLY AIRPORT IN PARIS, FRANCE: THE FLIGHT FROM MONTREAL TOUCHES DOWN WITH DRY WINGS...
MOST OF THE PASSENGERS HAVEN'T EVEN ORDERED THEIR THIRD DRINK...

...WHILE MARC SPECTOR IS COMPLETELY SOBER.
TAXI, M'SIEUR?
YEAH-- TO THE HOTEL REGINA.


BOO.
AGAIN?!
ONLY THE FIRST TIME-- UNLESS YOU ADMIT TO BEING STEVEN GRANT LAST NIGHT.


ALL RIGHT, LADY, IF YOU'RE GONNA BE THIS STUPID, I HOPE YOU AT LEAST HAD ENOUGH SENSE TO BRING THE COBRA FILES.
RIGHT HERE IN MY BAG, MISTER SPECTOR.

THE HOTEL REGINA...
WHEW! CRAZY PARIS CAB-DRIVERS-- THEY'RE WORSE THAN JAKE LOCKLEY.


...BUT AT LEAST WE GOT HERE. CAN WE RELAX FOR AWHILE?
NO! I'VE GOT TO STUDY THESE FILES FOR MOON KNIGHT'S MEETING WITH LeBLANC TONIGHT.

SUIT YOURSELF, SOLDIER, BUT I STILL SAY I LIKE YOU BETTER AS STEVEN GRANT.
YEAH I DO TOO...
...SOMETIMES.
LATER: A PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE AND APARTMENT JUST OFF THE LEFT BANK...
WHAT THE--?!
MY CARD. THE CRESCENT SHAPE STANDS FOR: MOON KNIGHT.
MON DIEU!
OPERATION COBRA AND AMOS LARDNER-- TALK, LeBLANC, OR I'LL RIP YOUR FAT FACE OFF.
TALK!
VERY WELL--THE PAPERS ARE RIGHT HERE ON MY DESK-- BUT PLEASE, DO NOT HURT ME!
IT IS THE FINAL DEVELOPMENT OF COBRA-- THE IMPLANTATION OF ELECTRODES IN THE BRAIN--
--TO STIMULATE PRODUCTION OF VARIOUS CHEMICALS GOVERNING DIFFERENT EMOTIONAL STATES AND MOODS.
SEPARATE AREAS OF THE BRAIN GOVERN SEPARATE RESPONSES. BY OVERRIDING THE NORMAL SENSORY SYSTEMS AND DIRECTLY STIMULATING THESE AREAS--
--WE CAN CONTROL THE BODY-- CONTROL BEHAVIOR-- THROUGH THE MIND.
ELECTRODE IN PLANT EI-7

THE G-GOAL ALL ALONG HAS BEEN TO MANIPULATE THE ENEMY'S MIND, MAKING HIM PERFORM TO ONE'S WILL AND THUS CREATING A DOUBLE AGENT WITHOUT THE AGENT HIMSELF REALIZING IT--
--OR SIMPLY INCAPACITATING HIM BEYOND RESISTANCE.
THERE ARE OTHER POSSIBILITIES AS WELL--TAPPING THE MIND'S LITTLE KNOWN POTENTIALS, PERHAPS EVEN E.S.P. OR... YOU'VE HEARD OF A MADMAN POSSESSING THE STRENGTH OF TEN NORMAL MEN?
THIS IS POSSIBLE.
FRAIL MOTHERS HAVE LIFTED ENTIRE AUTOMOBILES UNDER WHICH THEIR CHILDREN WERE TRAPPED. STRESS INDUCES A CHEMICAL REACTION IN THE BRAIN--ADRENALIN AND SO ON--INCREASING STRENGTH TENFOLD.
AND THIS IS BEING DONE--?
N-NO... NOT YET... BUT IT IS THEORETICALLY POSSIBLE. I AM TO DELIVER MY WORK PAPERS TO COMPANY AGENTS FOR PAYOFF SIX O'CLOCK TOMORROW NIGHT AT THE GATE OF THE MOON. COSSE--
FREEZE!!
AFTER YOU SURVIVED OUR SKIRMISH IN MONTREAL, I FIGURED YOU'D SHOW UP HERE IN PARIS--BUT I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D BEAT ME TO LEBLANC.
YOU'RE GOOD, BUSTER, TOO GOOD.
I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, BUT YOU'RE GONNA DIE TOO--ALONG WITH EVERYONE ELSE INVOLVED IN OPERATION COBRA--EVERYONE WHO DROVE MY BROTHER MAD UNTIL HE FINALLY KILLED HIMSELF!
YOU, LEBLANC, JENKINS, CRANE, AND ESPECIALLY MARC SPECTOR--ALL MUST DIE!
SPECTOR WAS ONLY THE FIRST!
RIPPING OFF THE BLACK HOOD, JAMES LARDNER BURNS MAD EYES THROUGH THE OFFICE GLOOM...

BUT SPECTOR HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT!
YOU'RE LYING TO PROTECT HIM, BUT I KNOW! I JOINED THE AGENCY TO FIND OUT-- STOLE THE FILES! SPECTOR KIDNAPED MY BROTHER, SMUGGLED HIM ACROSS THE CANADIAN BORDER--
--AND SLIPPED THE DRUG TO HIM PERSONALLY!
AMOS NEVER KNEW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM-- THOUGHT HE'D GONE CRAZY WORKING IN THAT RAVENCRAG ASYLUM--
--FINALLY JUMPED OUT OF THE HIGH WINDOW AND BROKE HIS NECK!
NO! THEY MUST'VE PINNED IT ON SPECTOR, FRAMED HIM, WHEN HE QUIT THE AGENCY AFTER LEARNING THE TRUTH ABOUT OPERATION: COBRA AND--
SHUT UP! SPECTOR'S ALREADY DEAD-- I KILLED HIM IN NEW YORK! AND NOW YOU'RE GOING TO--
THE CRESCENT DART WHIPS THE WEAPON ASIDE-- THE MOON KNIGHT MAKES HIS MOVE.
MON DIEU!
DISARMED, JAMES LARDNER BOLTS INTO FLIGHT.
YOU'VE BEEN SAVED THIS TIME, LeBLANC--BUT I'LL BE BACK--WHEREVER YOU CHOOSE TO HIDE!
OUTSIDE, LARDNER PLUNGES INTO HIS RENTED CAR... AND EVEN THOUGH MOON KNIGHT IS CLOSE BEHIND--
TOO LATE-- I'LL NEVER CATCH HIS CAR ON FOOT!

BUT THEN, ANOTHER CAR ROARS UP...
HOP ABOARD, SIR KNIGHT! WE CAN STILL CATCH THAT CAR!
MARLENE--?!?
YEP--AND NOW AREN'T YOU GLAD I DISOBEYED ORDERS?
SIR?
JUST HIT THAT GAS!
YOUR WISH IS MY COMMAND--BUT WHO ARE WE CHASING?
A VERY ANGRY BROTHER NAMED JAMES, DON'T SPARE THE CORNER!
BUT THEN, A THIRD CAR PULLS OUT TO BLOCK THE INTERSECTION--
LOOK OUT!!
--AND JAMES LARDNER'S CAR JAMS TOWARD A HALT.
MARLENE IS UNABLE TO STOP--
--AND MOON KNIGHT IS CATAPULTED FROM THE RUNNING BOARD...
...TO SLAM HIS HEAD AGAINST THE BACK OF LARDNER'S FISHTAILING CAR...

AND WHEN THE SOUNDS OF SCREAMING METAL HAVE DIED...
COME ON, JENKINS-- ALL THREE OF 'EM ARE OUT OF IT.
RIGHT, CRANE-- LET'S MOVE 'EM BEFORE THE COPS SHOW UP.
AN UN-KNOWN TIME LATER..
HE'S COMIN' TO, BUT AFTER ALL THAT DOPE WE PUMPED INTO HIM, HE WON'T KNOW THE DIFFER-ENCE...
WH-WHERE AM I...?
YOU'RE IN HELL, FRUITCAKE, AND YOU'RE GONNA ANSWER EVERY ONE OF SATAN'S QUESTIONS -- CUZ THE DEVIL USES CONVINCING PERSUASION.
FIRST QUESTION: WE KNOW YOU'RE MARC SPECTOR, BUT WHAT'S WITH THE FRUITY OUT-FIT? WHO ARE YOU?
NO...I'M NOT... SPECTOR...
ANSWER US! YOU CAN'T LIE! WHO ARE YOU?
I...I DON'T KNOW...
WHO ARE YOU?!
S-STEVEN... GRANT...

WHO ARE YOU?!
JAKE..JAKE LOCKLEY...
WHO--?!!
MOON...KNIGHT...
FOR THE LAST TIME: WHO ARE YOU?!
M-MARC... SPECTOR...
THAT'S BETTER. NOW,.. WHO'S THE GIRL?
GIRL...? GIRL--?!
M-MARLENE...!
"MARLENE!"
MARLEEEEENE!!
MRAAYAAAHH!!
SHOCKED BY THE FEAT OF STRENGTH, JENKINS AND CRANE TRY TO MOVE-- BUT FIND THERE IS NO TIME.
BOTH MEN ARE UNCONSCIOUS BEFORE THEY HIT THE FLOOR.

HYPED BY PANIC, JUICED BY THE DRUG SIZZLING THROUGH HIS BLOOD... MOON KNIGHT GOES BERSERK.
HE KICKS HIS WAY OUT OF THE LOCKED ROOM...
... STUMBLES INTO AN OPULENT CONSERVATORY...
MARLENE--?
TOPPLING STATUES AND PLANTS, HE WEAVES TOWARD A FAR DOOR...
INSIDE...
MARLENE...?
AN OPERATING ROOM...? NO... JUST A HALLUCINATION... I'M SEEING WHAT LE BLANC DESCRIBED TO ME...
DRUNKENLY, HE MOVES THROUGH THE AMPHITHEATER BALCONY TOWARD ANOTHER DOOR
IN THERE...?
MARLENE--? NO.. YOU'RE LIKE MARLENE... ALL OF YOU... ALL BEAUTIFUL... BUT YOU'RE NOT MARLENE...
MAYBE... NEXT... ROOM... NEXT.. DOOR...

MARLENE!
WHA--? HOW THE HELL DID YOU--
COME ON, MARLENE..
GOT TO... GET YOU OUT OF HERE
HEAR THAT, CRANE? HE'S GETTING AWAY! COME ON!
WHERE ARE WE, STEVEN?
DON'T KNOW--NOT IN PARIS ANYMORE. OUT IN THE COUNTRY SOMEWHERE...
THERE HE IS-- AND HE'S GOT THE GIRL! SHOOT HIM!

THEN, STILL DAZZLED BY THE DRUG, MOON KNIGHT REACTS TO A SOUND IN THE SKY...
FRENCHIE? NO... HELICOPTER LOOKS WRONG... ALL WRONG. NOT LIKE FRENCHIE'S CHOPPER.
BUT... THEY'RE COMING... FAST...
TAKE THE LADDER, MARC--TAKE IT!
ALL WRONG... BUT STILL... ONLY CHANCE...
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?!
MON DIEU! A VERY CLOSE ONE INDEED!
BEYOND BULLET RANGE, FRENCHIE VEERS FOR PARIS.

AND, BACK IN THE ELEGANT COUNTRY ESTATE...
MSSR CHARLES LEBLANC
FINISHED-- AT LAST.
THE FAR DOOR BURSTS OPEN.
HE ESCAPED, LeBLANC--WITH THE GIRL!
OH?
BUT IT IS NO MATTER... NOT NOW. FOLLOW ME, INTO THE OPERATING ROOM, AND I SHALL SHOW YOU...
I GIVE YOU-- THE FIRST OF MANY FUTURE AGENTS.
I GIVE YOU-- MY SUPREME CREATION.
I GIVE YOU-- COBRA.
YOU WENT AHEAD WITH IT?! NOW?!
WHY NOT? IT WAS PERFECTED. ALL WE NEEDED WAS A SUITABLE TEST SUBJECT WHO WAS EXPENDABLE IF NECESSARY... OR CONTROLLABLE IF NOT.
AND WE HAD TO DO SOMETHING WITH THE TROUBLESOME MR. JAMES LARDNER..
HE WAS ALREADY MAD-- DRIVEN INSANE WHEN HE LEARNED OF HIS BROTHER'S UNFORTUNATE FATE. HAD HE FAILED TO ASSASSINATE US, HE SURELY WOULD HAVE INFORMED THE AUTHORITIES.
SO... JUST TRUST ME.

THE OPERATION IS A COMPLETE SUCCESS I WILL DEMONSTRATE FOR YOU...
..AND THE FIRST TEST WILL ACTIVATE THE ELECTRODE-IMPLANT GOVERNING THE PORTION OF THE BRAIN WHICH PRODUCES ADRENALIN..
...ENOUGH ADRENALIN TO COUNTERACT THE EFFECTS OF THE ANES-THESIA USED TO PER-FORM THE OPERATION ITSELF.
AND NOW, WATCH AS I PRESS OTHER BUTTONS...
...ACTIVATING OTHER ELECTRODES
...GOVERNING OTHER RESPONSES, SUCH AS AMUSEMENT..
...SORROW..
...AND RAGE.

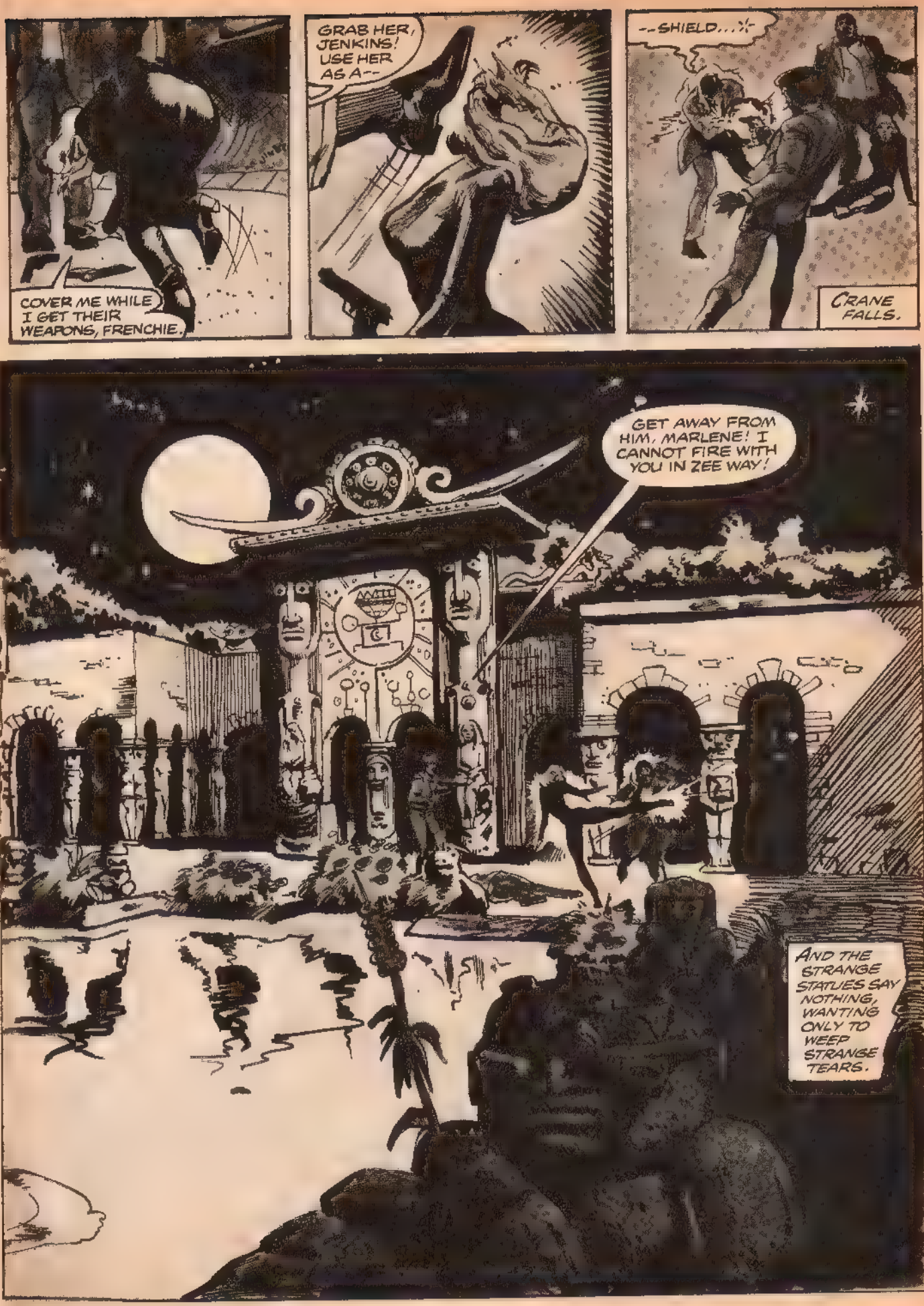
FOR THE FINAL DEMONSTRATION-- I SHALL STIMULATE SEVERAL AREAS OF HIS BRAIN SIMULTANEOUSLY--
--GIVING HIM THE STRENGTH OF A MADMAN, OR TEN NORMAL MEN.
HE IS CONDON'S "MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE"-- BUT NEW AND IMPROVED-- OUR "COBRA," THE PERFECTLY MIND-CONTROLLED AGENT OR ASSASSIN...
...AND MOON KNIGHT'S EXECUTIONER.
YEAH, BUT THIS MOON KNIGHT KNOWS WE'RE HERE, LeBLANC.
HE WILL NOT RETURN HERE. HE FORCED ME TO TALK, BUT I TOLD HIM NOTHING OF REAL VALUE OTHER THAN OUTLINING THE IMPLANT TECHNIQUE--
--WHICH IS COMMON THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE ANYWAY.
I DID NOT TELL HIM THAT REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COMPANY-- YOU-- HAD ALREADY EXCHANGED MONEY FOR THAT TECHNIQUE. INDEED, I CONVINCED HIM THE OPPOSITE WAS TRUE-- THAT WE WILL MEET TOMORROW EVENING AT COSSE-LE-VIVIEN FOR THE EXCHANGE.
ONCE THE DRUG HAS WORN OFF, HE WILL BARELY HAVE TIME TO GET THERE-- BUT HE WILL GO. YOU SEE, HE WILL WANT TO PREVENT THE EXCHANGE, DESTROY MY WORK PAPERS BEFORE AN ACTUAL TEST CAN BE CARRIED OUT.
OF COURSE, HE DOES NOT REALIZE THAT SUCH A TEST HAS ALREADY BEEN CARRIED OUT, OR THAT WE SHALL BE WAITING FOR HIM. WITH A CONCEALED COBRA ON OUR SIDE.

THE HOTEL REGINA...
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, STEVEN?
YEAH... THE WALLS ARE STILL BENDING AND MELTING A BIT, BUT I'LL SHAKE OUT OF IT NOW I KNOW WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE AN AMOS LARDNER-- HELPLESS AT THE HANDS OF THE COMPANY'S MIND-CONTROL EXPERIMENTS.
WHEN YOU TOOK TOO LONG IN RETURNING TO ZEE HOTEL, MARC, I RENTED A CONVENTIONAL HELICOPTER--
BUT WHERE'D YOU COME FROM, FRENCHIE?
--AND GAMBLED THAT YOU HAD GONE TO LeBLANC'S COUNTRY ESTATE...
WAIT A MINUTE-- WHAT TIME IS IT?
FOUR.
WE'VE GOT TO GET TO THE GATE OF THE MOON BY SIX-- TO STOP THE ULTIMATE IN MIND-CONTROL-- DIRECT ELECTRODE MANIPULATION.
GATE OF THE MOON? ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE ALL RIGHT?
YEAH, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE IT IS... UNLESS "COSSE" MEANS SOMETHING...
I HAVE ZEE MAPS RIGHT HERE, MARC.
COSSE-LE-VIVIEN! OF COURSE! THE TATIN MUSEUM --A FABULOUS PLACE, CREATED ENTIRELY BY THE HANDS OF A SINGLE MAN.
I SAW IT DURING MY LAST VISIT HERE. TWO OF THE MUSEUM'S MAIN FEATURES, AND TATIN'S CROWNING ACHIEVEMENTS--
--ARE THE GATE OF THE SUN AND THE GATES OF THE MOON!
THEN LET'S GO!
OUI, MARC!
BUT STEVEN-- ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE ALL RIGHT?
I'LL HAVE TO BE.
ALL RIGHT, BUT I'M COMING WITH YOU--AND NO ARGUE-MENTS THIS TIME! I'LL BE READY IN THREE MINUTES.

TWO HOURS LATER· THE TATIN MUSEUM AT COSSE-LE-VIVIEN...
I'LL DROP OUT HERE.
AND WE'LL SET DOWN NEARBY TO BACK YOU UP.
FRENCHIE MANAGED TO GET A GUN.
AND SO, A DRAMATIC FIGURE OF JET AND SILVER PLUMMETS FROM THE HELICOPTER .. THEN SWOOPS AND SOARS INTO A GLIDING FLIGHT...
...WHICH ENDS, LIGHTLY, ATOP THE BIZARRE GATE OF THE MOON.
THE REAL MOON RISES FULL IN THE TWILIGHT MIST...
SOMEONE'S DOWN THERE-- ENTERING THE COURTYARD-- WALKING STIFFLY...
LARDNER...?

LARDNER--?
.. AND--
LARDNER, IS THAT YOU?
IN NEAR SILENCE, A CAR CRUISES TOWARD THE ENTRANCE BEYOND "TATIN'S DRAGON"...
UHN--!
WHAT THE--?!
HIS HAT CAME OFF -- AND HIS HEAD
THAT OPERATING ROOM -- IT WASN'T A HALLUCINATION!
TWO FIGURES EMERGE FROM THE CAR...
WE'LL MAKE SURE COBRA DOES THE JOB, LeBLANC.
HE WILL, MR CRANE.
THEN WE'LL JUST WATCH.
THEY'VE ALREADY DONE IT! THEY'VE MADE THEIR PERFECT FRANKENSTEIN MONSTER -- AND THEY'VE USED YOU, LARDNER!

YOU'VE GOT TO LISTEN TO ME!
BUT MOON KNIGHT DOES NOT SPEAK IN THE VOICE OF BUTTONS.
JENKINS AND CRANE ENTER THE COURT-YARD--
--FOLLOWED BY FRENCHIE AND MARLENE.
FREEZE--ZEN TURN AROUND SLOWLY AND DROP ZEE GUNS.
AND IN A WONDROUS PLACE OF THE MIND, BOUND ONLY BY THE GATES OF THE SUN AND MOON, AND BATHED IN A SILVER GLOW...TWO FORCES OF VIOLENCE EXPLODE.
CAN'T BELIEVE HOW STRONG HE IS NOW-- MUCH, MUCH MORE POWERFUL THAN I AM EVEN IN THE VERY PEAK OF CONDITION.


COVER ME WHILE I GET THEIR WEAPONS, FRENCHIE.
GRAB HER, JENKINS! USE HER AS A--
--SHIELD...
CRANE FALLS.
GET AWAY FROM HIM, MARLENE! I CANNOT FIRE WITH YOU IN ZEE WAY!
AND THE STRANGE STATUES SAY NOTHING, WANTING ONLY TO WEEP STRANGE TEARS.

HE DOESN'T EVEN FEEL MY TRUNCHEON-- CAN'T FEEL PAIN-- EVEN IF I BROKE EVERY BONE IN HIS BODY!
NOT SO WITH MARLENE'S OPPONENT..
GUHH--!
OOH LA LA!
OUTSIDE THE GATE, LeBLANC LEAVES HIS CAR...
CAN'T SEE THEM ANYMORE--MUST GET CLOSER.
CAN'T CONTROL COBRA IF I CAN'T SEE HIM...
LeBLANC! AND HE'S HOLDING SOMETHING-- DOING SOMETHING WITH IT AND WATCHING LARDNER AT THE SAME TIME...
THE TRUNCHEON'S AIM IS TRUE.
SPARKS BURST FROM THE SHATTERED CONTROL BOARD.
AND COBRA SPASMS IN PAIN, CLUTCHING THE CRUEL SPIKES IN HIS HEAD.
I WAS RIGHT! THE THING CONTROLLED HIS ELECTRODES--AND I SHORT-CIRCUITED IT! HE'S GOING BERSERK!
GOTTA GAMBLE-- SEE IF THAT THING DOES WHAT I THINK IT DOES...

IN MINDLESS RAGE, THE BEAST NOW SIGHTS LeBLANC... AND ...AS A COBRA CHASES THE FAT MAN...
WHO WAS ONCE JAMES LARDNER
MOON KNIGHT IS FORGOTTEN
NO!!
LeBLANC SCURRIES FOR HIS CAR--
--AND BY THE TIME MOON KNIGHT EMERGES FROM THE MUSEUM...
NO! LeBLANC'S BEARING DOWN ON HIM AT TOP SPEED-- AND LARDNER DOESN'T HAVE ENOUGH SENSE TO GET OUT OF THE WAY!!
GOTTA STOP THAT CAR!
THE CRESCENT-DART FINDS ITS MARK...
...AND THE WOUNDED METAL BEAST THEN SWERVES, AND IS SLAIN
BUT THE COBRA IS NOT YET APPEASED, HAS NOT YET MADE HIS STRIKE... AND SO, HE BEATS ON THE FLAMING THING.

FINALLY, HE SEEKS ITS SOFT BELLY...
NO, LARDNER! GET AWAY!! THE CAR'S GONNA BLOW!
ELSEWHERE...
GET HIM, FRENCHIE! NOW, LET'S GO HELP MARC!
TOO LATE.
THEN... THEY'RE ALL DEAD, CRANE... JENKINS... LeBLANC... LARDNER... AND THE COMPANY'S DREAM OF CREATING THE PERFECT AGENT...
...YEAH. DEAD. NOW LET'S GET THE BODIES OUT OF HERE.
THEY'RE SPOILING A REAL CREATION.
BUT SOMEHOW... THE STRANGE TEARS NEVER FALL.

epilogue:
MORNING: THE HOTEL REGINA...
Hotel Regina
READY TO LEAVE, STEVEN?
YES, BUT WE'VE GOT A STOP TO MAKE BEFORE GOING TO THE AIRPORT...
..LeBLANC'S COUNTRY ESTATE--WHERE HIS OFFICE WILL EXPERIENCE A FIRE. NOTHING TOO BAD... ALTHOUGH ALL HIS WORK RECORDS WILL BE REGRETTABLY LOST.
AND THEN?
AND THEN ONE LAST LOOSE END IN THE STATES.
...WEST VIRGINIA, TO BE EXACT.
YOU REALIZE, LADY, HOW FUSSY SAMUELS IS... EVEN ABOUT THE GARAGE.
"COMPANY" HEADQUARTERS, TWO DAYS LATER...
WHAT THE HELL IS THAT--AND HOW DID IT GET IN HERE PAST ALL THE SECURITY?!
I DON'T KNOW, SIR--MUST'VE BEEN DELIVERED IN THE NIGHT. IT'S GOT SOME FRENCH WORDS ON IT--"MANIPULER AVEC SOIN."
TO: THE COMPANY
WELL, GET THE DAMN BOMB SQUAD BEFORE YOU TRY OPENING IT. THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT IT MIGHT CONTAIN.
--IN SUMMATION, THE TAG-LINE FOR THIS CASE REMAINS: MANIPULER AVEC SOIN. AS STRONG AS IT CAN BE, THE MIND IS INDEED A PRECIOUS, FRAGILE THING
BUT THE MINDS OF AMOS AND JAMES LARDNER WERE DEFINITELY NOT HANDLED WITH CARE.
CASE OF THE COBRA: CLOSED.
End

U S POSTAL SERVICE
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LAUGHING IN THE DARK

A very different breed of hero is this gentleman, the Shroud. Certainly there have been others – the Moon Knight included — who have used the protective cover of darkness to hide their operations. But until the Shroud came along, no one truly controlled that darkness.

"All right," you may well say, "his powers are pretty off the wall. But powers do not a hero make. What about motivations, *modus operandi*, all that crime buster stuff?"

Glad you asked.

It's true that the Shroud's original motivation, namely vengeance over the criminal element who had wiped out his family, was not so very different from that of many other heroes. Spider Man, Daredevil, the Black Panther, and the Punisher — among others — have all been motivated to take on their careers at least partially due to having loved ones die at the hand of some criminal type. For the Shroud, however, vengeance became more than just a motivation. It became a burning passion, a near psychosis that drove him on, day after day.

Moreover, the Shroud is a self-made hero. Driven as he was by this need to strike back at criminals, he pushed himself to the limit, developing his mental and physical skills to the peak of perfection. Had he been content with that mortal level of ability, he would have undoubtedly become one of the most highly skilled police agents in the history of criminology.

Such, of course, was not the case.

This nameless young man desired powers and abilities of a more extraordinary nature, something to give him that extra edge to insure that he would have his vengeance. And so his mania drove him on — on to discover the ancient Cult of Kali, hidden high in the Himalayas — on to become a disciple of their dark arts — on to finally lose his sight in a bizarre ritual known as the Kiss of Kali. He had become the first victim of his own quest for vengeance.

Blinded and disfigured, apparently abandoned by the mystic cult, the young man discovered that he now possessed an eerie, supernatural sense of perception that went beyond sight. And more, he soon discovered that he could control the dark forces of the night — that he could pull the inky, light-defying shadows about him, as easily as he might pull a cloak — that he could mold and shape the darkness as he wished! And while other so-called creatures of the night had to wait for sundown to act, this man — this Shroud — found that he could bring the dark along with him, even into the harsh light of day!

So armed — with his wits, his skill, and his weird mystic abilities — the Shroud began his fight for the elimination of crime.

Still sounds like a number of other heroes, right?

Ah, but there's one final difference.

The Shroud has now begun to battle crime from within! Setting up his own gang, he undermines the activities of the crime lords under the pretense of being a master criminal himself!

It's a very different, very difficult path to follow, to be sure. By deliberately assuming such a position, he places himself in jeopardy from both the law and the underworld.

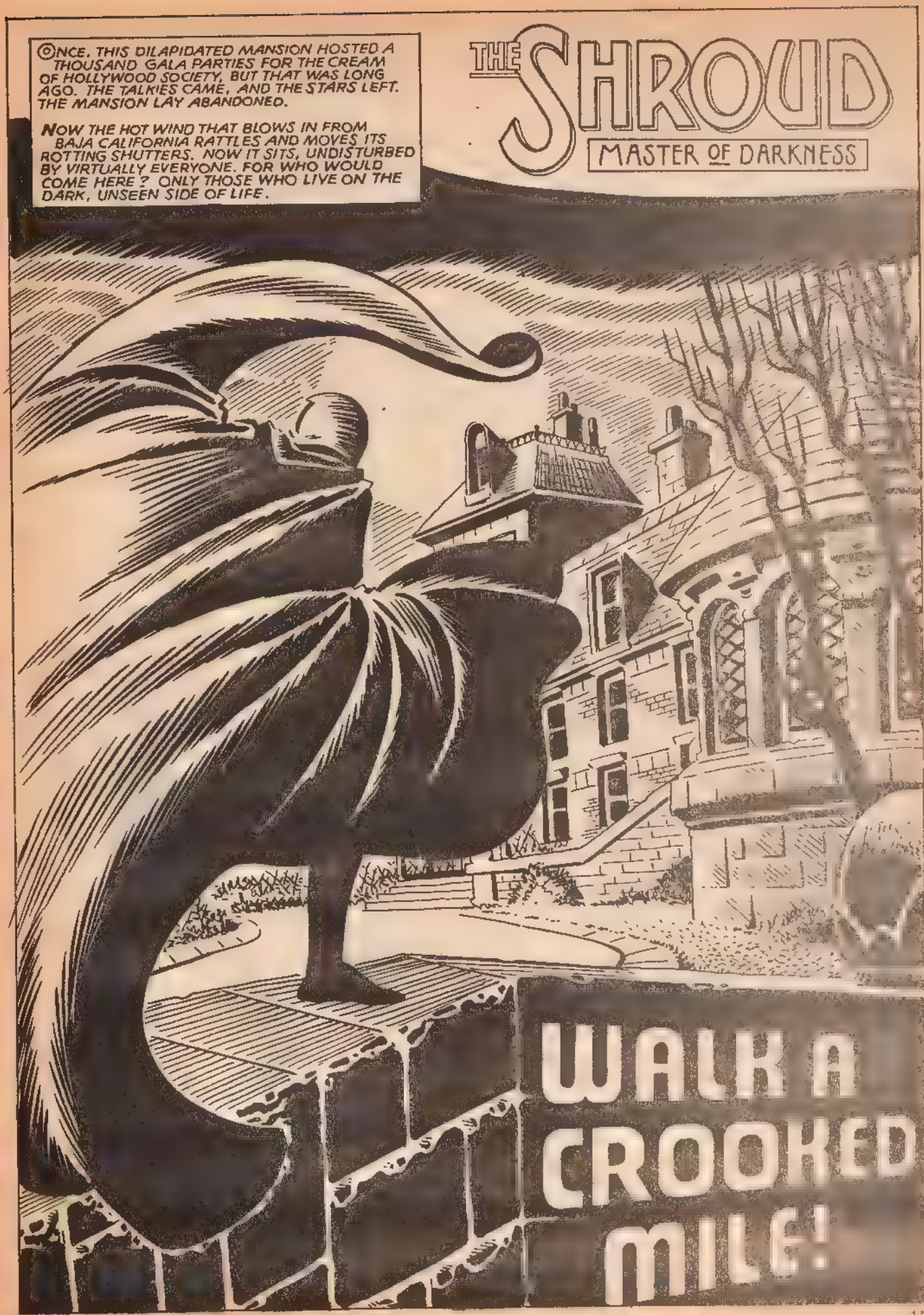
And mayhap from other heroes.

But such worries don't bother the Shroud. He is, after all, a driven man, a man possessed with the need to battle crime in all its myriad forms. That his war against crime might eventually bring about his own destruction is of matter to this Master of Darkness.

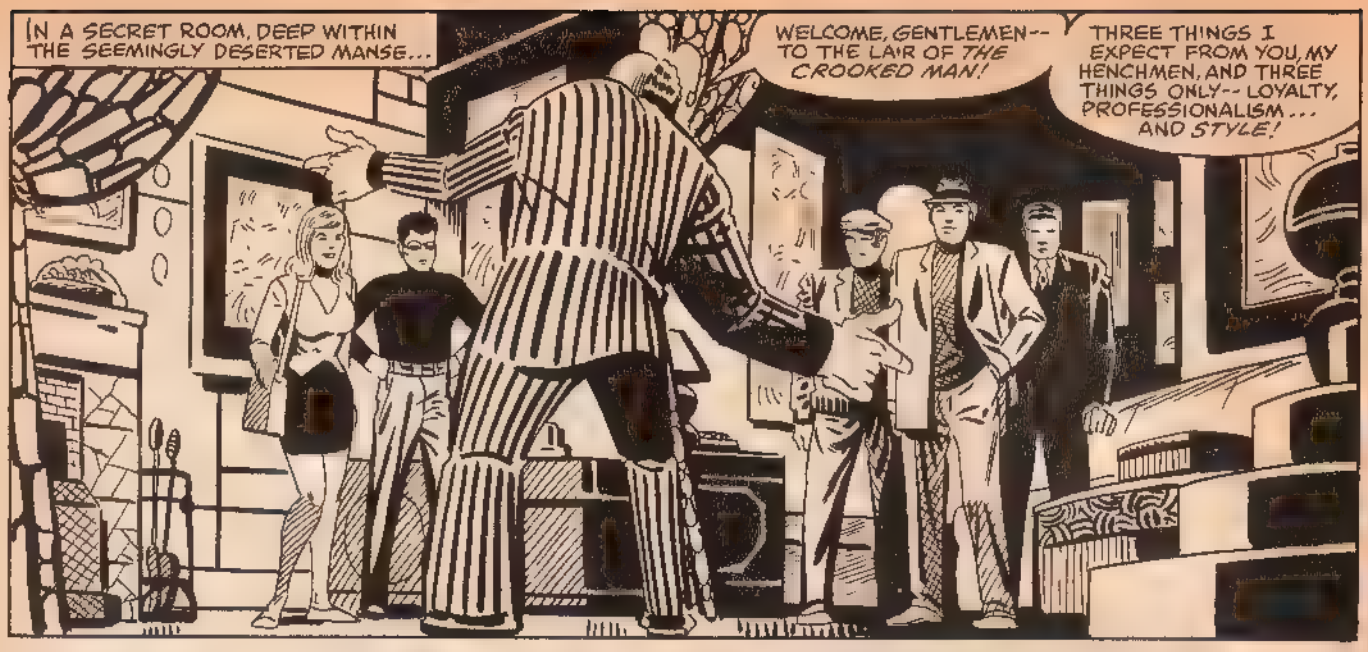
All that matters is vengeance.

Think about that the next time you walk through the shadows.

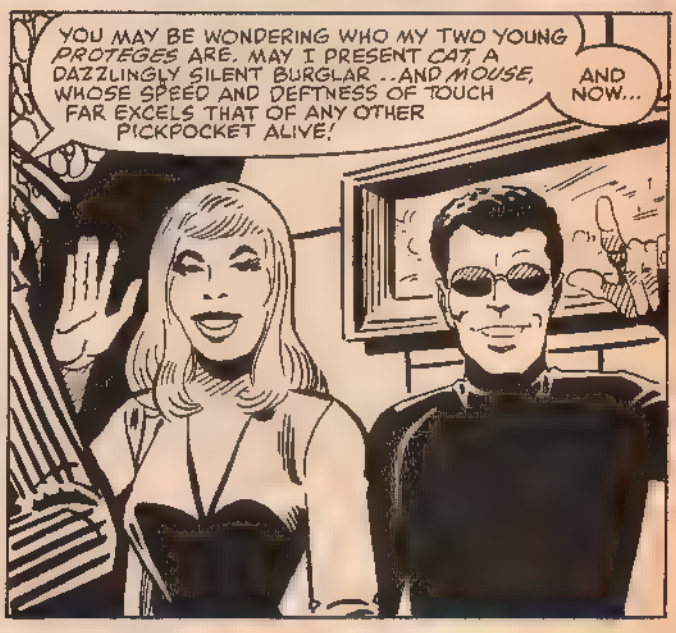
— — Roger Stern


ONCE, THIS DILAPIDATED MANSION HOSTED A THOUSAND GALA PARTIES FOR THE CREAM OF HOLLYWOOD SOCIETY, BUT THAT WAS LONG AGO. THE TALKIES CAME, AND THE STARS LEFT. THE MANSION LAY ABANDONED.
NOW THE HOT WIND THAT BLOWS IN FROM BAJA CALIFORNIA RATTLES AND MOVES ITS ROTTING SHUTTERS. NOW IT SITS, UNDISTURBED BY VIRTUALLY EVERYONE. FOR WHO WOULD COME HERE? ONLY THOSE WHO LIVE ON THE DARK, UNSEEN SIDE OF LIFE.
THE SHROUD
MASTER OF DARKNESS
WALK A CROOKED MILE!

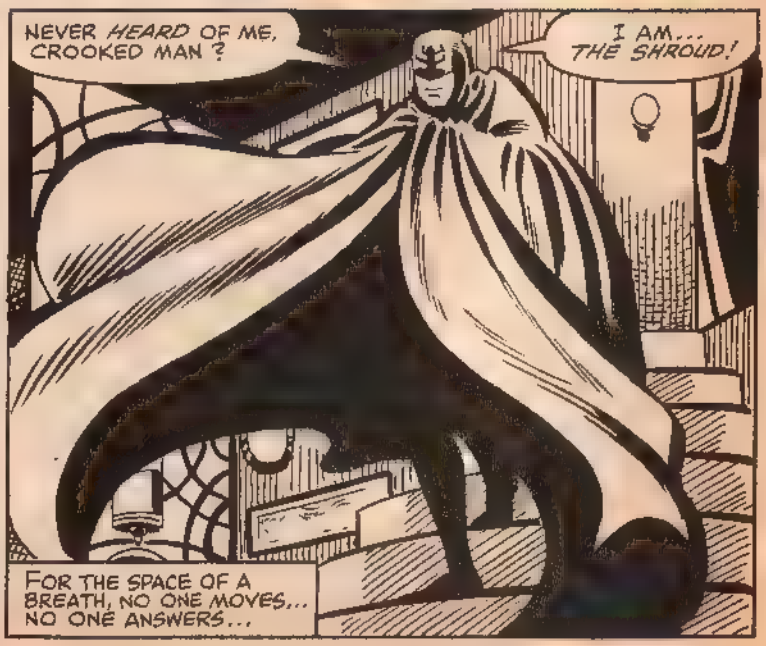
Script. MARK GRUENWALD & STEVEN GRANT Art STEVE DITKO


IN A SECRET ROOM, DEEP WITHIN THE SEEMINGLY DESERTED MANSE...
WELCOME, GENTLEMEN-- TO THE LAIR OF THE CROOKED MAN!
THREE THINGS I EXPECT FROM YOU, MY HENCHMEN, AND THREE THINGS ONLY-- LOYALTY, PROFESSIONALISM... AND STYLE!

WE EXIST FOR STYLE, GENTLEMEN! IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO BE A CRIMINAL, FOR ANY FOOL CAN ACCOMPLISH THAT! WE MUST BE ARTISTS... OF CRIME!
LET US WORK TOGETHER TO MAKE CRIME AN AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE-- A WORK OF ART THAT OUR PUBLIC WILL APPLAUD! MY STANDARDS ARE HIGH, YES... BUT LET NO MAN AMONG YOU WHO VALUES HIS LIFE SINK BELOW THEM.


YOU MAY BE WONDERING WHO MY TWO YOUNG PROTEGES ARE. MAY I PRESENT CAT, A DAZZLINGLY SILENT BURGLAR ..AND MOUSE, WHOSE SPEED AND DEFTNESS OF TOUCH FAR EXCELS THAT OF ANY OTHER PICKPOCKET ALIVE!
AND NOW...

NOW IT'S MY TURN TO TALK, CROOKED MAN!
LOOK!
FOOL! WHO DARES TO INVADE MY DOMAIN?


NEVER HEARD OF ME, CROOKED MAN?
I AM... THE SHROUD!
FOR THE SPACE OF A BREATH, NO ONE MOVES... NO ONE ANSWERS...

THEN...
THE STORIES OF YOU RANG FALSE, SHROUD! I COULD NOT BELIEVE SUCH A MAN EXISTED... A MAN WHO COULD SO EASILY BYPASS MY DEFENSES! YET HERE YOU ARE...
CRUSH HIM!
THE SHROUD MAKES NO MOVE TO DEFEND HIMSELF. FROM THE FOLDS OF HIS CLOAK SLIDE INKY SHADOWS... WHICH SWALLOW UP THE LIGHT...
HEY! HOW'D IT GET SO DARK IN HERE? I CAN'T SEE MY HAND IN FRONT OF MY FACE! WHERE--?
UHHN!
THOK
WHAM!
WHUMP!
SWAK!
SHOULDN'T WE DO SOMETHING?
NO! THEY WERE HIRED FOR THEIR MUSCLE, AND YOU FOR YOUR SKILLS! SO YOU SEE? THE DARKNESS IS LIFTING... THE SHROUD IS BEATEN!
NOW, CROOKED MAN... DO WE TALK?

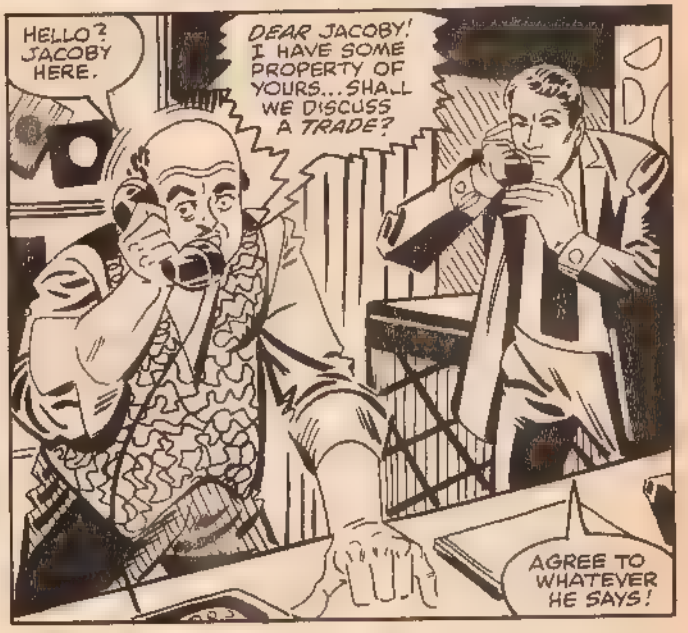
YOUR STAGE TRICKS MAY HAVE AVAILED YOU AGAINST MY MEN, SHROUD. . BUT IT IS THE CROOKED MAN YOU FACE NOW! NO SLEIGHT OF HAND WILL HELP YOU NOW!
DON'T YOU LISTEN, MAN?
I WANT TO JOIN YOU!
PARDON ME?
I'VE DECIDED TO PUT MY POWERS TO USE-- IN YOUR SERVICE!
MY POSITION AS CRIMELORD OF LOS ANGELES WAS HARD-WON, SHROUD -- AND I DID NOT ATTAIN IT BY TRUSTING PEOPLE I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT!
WHAT MAKES YOU WORTHY TO WORK WITH ME? WHAT DO I KNOW ABOUT YOU? WHAT?
WHAT DO I TELL YOU, CROOKED MAN?
"DO I TELL YOU THAT I SAW MY PARENTS BEING GUNNED DOWN IN COLD BLOOD BY A PETTY HOLD-UP MAN?
"THAT I VOWED TO AVENGE THEIR DEATHS--AND LABORED THROUGHOUT MY CHILDHOOD UNTIL MY MIND AND BODY WERE PERFECT ENOUGH TO CARRY OUT THAT VOW?
"THAT EVEN THAT PEAK OF DEVELOPMENT WASN'T ENOUGH FOR ME? DO I TELL YOU OF THE SKILLS TAUGHT ME BY THE PRIESTS OF THE IND,AN CULT OF KALI AFTER I SOUGHT THEM OUT?
"SHOULD I TELL YOU THAT THEY BLESSED ME WITH THE KISS OF KALI, WHICH DISFIGURED MY FACE--AND BLINDED ME?
"OR THAT MY SIGHT WAS REPLACED BY A SENSE OF...PERCEPTION...AND THAT I HAD GAINED THE POWER TO SUMMON DARKNESS? DO I TELL YOU THE SECRET OF THE SHROUD?"

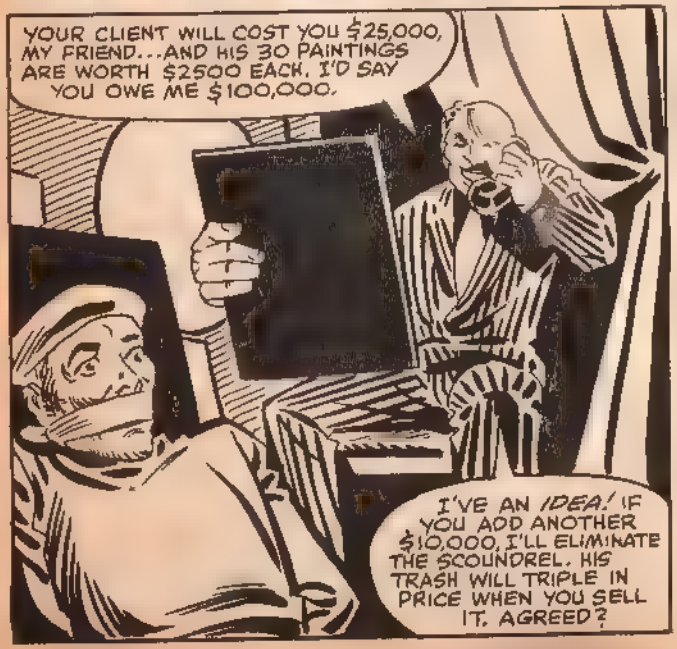
NO, MY PAST MUST REMAIN A MYSTERY TO ALL BUT MYSELF.
YOU'VE SEEN WHAT I CAN DO, CROOKED MAN, THAT'S ALL I CAN TELL YOU.
YOU PRESUME TOO MUCH, MY YOUNG FRIEND. I WILL LEAVE YOU YOUR HISTORY, FOR THE MOMENT-- BUT I MUST SEE YOUR FACE. UNMASK!
IT ISN'T IN MY INTEREST FOR YOU TO SEE MY FACE, CROOKED MAN. SO...
THE DARK-NESS...
ENOUGH! YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT, MY FRIEND! YOU MAY PUT YOUR COWL BACK ON!
IT'S ADVANTAGEOUS FOR ME TO HAVE SOMEONE OF YOUR POWERS IN MY ENTOURAGE-- AND YOU HAVE STYLE, I'LL GIVE YOU THAT. WELCOME TO MY ORGANIZATION, SHROUD-- BUT REMEMBER THAT I RULE HERE!
FINE, CROOKED MAN.
EXCELLENT! I HAVE A MISSION IN MIND FOR YOU ALREADY-- WHICH WILL BRING US A FORTUNE...
AND DISPOSE OF YOU SIMULTANEOUSLY, MY MYSTERIOUS MASKED MAN!
THE NEXT DAY, AT THE OPENING OF A NEW ART EXHIBIT IN THE LOS ANGELES GALLERY OF ART...
THIS WORK REPRESENTS THE FRAGILITY OF MAN, CRUSHED BY AN UNTHINKING NATURE AND AN UNBENDING SOCIETY...
YES... I SEE THAT! SUCH SWEEP AND PASSION... IT'S TRULY THRILLING!
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT JUST A YEAR AGO HE WAS A DISHWASHER WHO HAD NEVER TOUCHED A PAINT BRUSH...
SIR... THERE'S NO SMOKING IN HERE! PLEASE PUT OUT YOUR CIGARETTE.
RUBBISH! EVERY BIT OF IT! NO TASTE, NO STYLE... IS ANYTHING ACCEPTED AS ART IN THIS AGE?

I'D BE MOST HAPPY TO...
POOF!
ARRR...
STAY RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE, COPPER!
NOBODY ELSE MOVE NEITHER!
FORGIVE MY GUTTERAL HENCHMEN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THEY ARE SIMPLY TRYING TO ASK YOU TO COOPERATE -- WE WOULD NOT WANT ANYONE *SHOT*!
OH, LORD-- IT'S A HOLD-UP!
CALM YOURSELF, MY DEAR WOMAN! WE ARE COMMITTING NO CRIME HERE-- WE ARE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF ONE! LET ME EXPLAIN...
LOOK AROUND YOU, MY FRIENDS! *THIS* IS ART! REMBRANDT, RAPHAEL, TITIAN! MASTERWORKS OF STYLE AND POWER AND SKILL!
YET *THIS*...CRETIN... HAS DARED TO RANK HIS PETTY, MISERABLE SEWAGE AMONG THIS COMPANY OF GIANTS-- AND, TRICKED BY THE CRITICS, YOU *AID* HIM!
C'MON, MAN-- IT'S SELF-EXPRESSION!
BAH! LET *ME* EXPRESS MYSELF, WRETCH-- NO ONE APPRECIATES THESE GREAT MASTERS AS MUCH AS I...
IT IS *FITTING* THAT I SHOULD HAVE THEM FOR MY OWN!

THIS MOCKERY OF AN ARTIST--AND HIS WORK--WE WILL ALSO TAKE WITH US! CALL HIS AGENT WHEN YOU AWAKEN! TELL HIM I WILL SELL THE JUNK AND THE JUNK-MONGER BACK TO HIM--FOR A PRICE!
AU REVOIR, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS LATER IN THE OFFICE OF ART AGENT FRANK JACOBY..
CALM DOWN, JACOBY! WEARING OUT THE RUG WON'T GET YOUR CLIENT BACK!
THAT BOY IS MORE THAN MY BREAD AND BUTTER, LT. BERG... HE'S LIKE A SON TO ME. IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO HIM...
RRNG!


HELLO? JACOBY HERE.
DEAR JACOBY! I HAVE SOME PROPERTY OF YOURS... SHALL WE DISCUSS A TRADE?
AGREE TO WHATEVER HE SAYS!

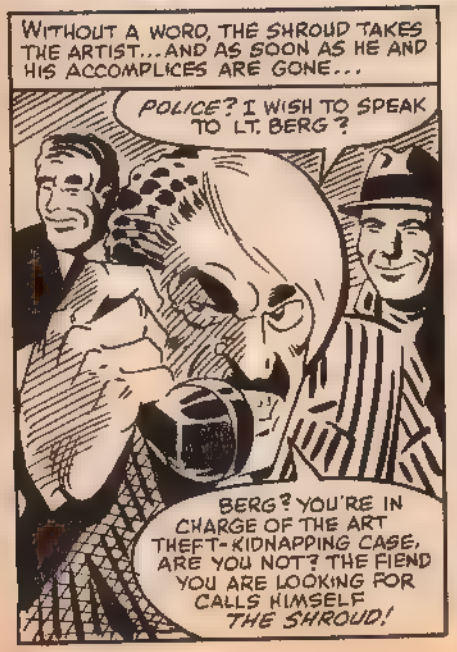

YOUR CLIENT WILL COST YOU $25,000, MY FRIEND... AND HIS 30 PAINTINGS ARE WORTH $2500 EACH. I'D SAY YOU OWE ME $100,000.
I'VE AN IDEA! IF YOU ADD ANOTHER $10,000, I'LL ELIMINATE THE SCOUNDREL. HIS TRASH WILL TRIPLE IN PRICE WHEN YOU SELL IT. AGREED?

NO? JUST A THOUGHT-- NOW, MY FRIEND, HERE'S WHAT YOU'RE TO DO...

LATER...
THE FIRST PORTION OF MY PLAN IS COMPLETED! THE REST IS NOW ON THE SHOULDERS OF YOU THREE!

I'VE GIVEN YOU YOUR INSTRUCTIONS, MY CHILDREN! USE YOUR TRICKS, SHROUD, TO CONFUSE YOUR CONTACT! DELIVER THIS FRAUD--*INTACT*, IF YOU PLEASE.

OFF WITH YOU NOW! MR. JACOBY... AND OUR MONEY... ARE WAITING!


WITHOUT A WORD, THE SHROUD TAKES THE ARTIST... AND AS SOON AS HE AND HIS ACCOMPLICES ARE GONE...
POLICE? I WISH TO SPEAK TO LT. BERG?
BERG? YOU'RE IN CHARGE OF THE ART THEFT-KIDNAPPING CASE, ARE YOU NOT? THE FIEND YOU ARE LOOKING FOR CALLS HIMSELF *THE SHROUD!*

HE WILL BE HARD TO CATCH! DOUBLE THE NUMBER OF MEN YOU NORMALLY USE ON SUCH A CASE--AND ARM THEM WITH NETS AND SPECIAL WEAPONS.--CLICK!
HELLO? *HELLO?*
SERGEANT! I WANT AN EXTRA SQUAD OF MEN, READY TO GO IMMEDIATELY! WE HAVE A *THIEF* TO COLLAR!

9:30 PM. LOS ANGELES PARK...
ART AGENT FRANK JACOBY APPROACHES THE DESIGNATED DROP POINT. AHEAD, HE SEES NOTHING... SAVE PATCHES OF SHADOW...

SUDDENLY, FROM ONE SUCH SHADOW...
MR. JACOBY?
OHHH... WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?
I'VE BEEN NEXT TO YOU ALL THE WAY DOWN THE PATH... YOU SIMPLY DIDN'T SEE ME!
I BELIEVE YOU HAVE SOMETHING FOR ME...
Y-YES...
R-RIGHT HERE IN MY B-B-B...
MY BRIEFCASE! IT'S GONE!
AT THAT MOMENT, NOT TOO FAR AWAY...
GREAT MOVE, MOUSE... TAKING THAT BRIEFCASE RIGHT OFF THE HANDLE WHILE THE SHROUD COVERED US! YOU'VE GOT THE BEST HANDS IN THE BUSINESS...
STILL, I WISH WE DIDN'T HAVE TO LEAVE THE SHROUD...
THOSE WERE THE CROOKED MAN'S ORDERS, BABY! COME BACK WITHOUT HIM!
STILL...
STILL, NOTHING! THE CROOKED MAN TOOK US OFF THE STREETS! WHAT DO WE OWE THIS SHROUD CHARACTER?
MEANWHILE...
REST ASSURED, MR. JACOBY... THE MONEY IS IN OUR HANDS. WITHIN A SHORT TIME, YOUR CLIENT WILL BE RETURNED TO YOU...
WH-WHERE IS HE?!
NEARBY... AS ARE THE POLICE YOU WERE INSTRUCTED NOT TO BRING...
I KEPT MY WORD... I SWEAR IT! PLEASE -- GIVE ME BACK MY CLIENT!
VERY WELL... LOOK TO THE SHADOWS!

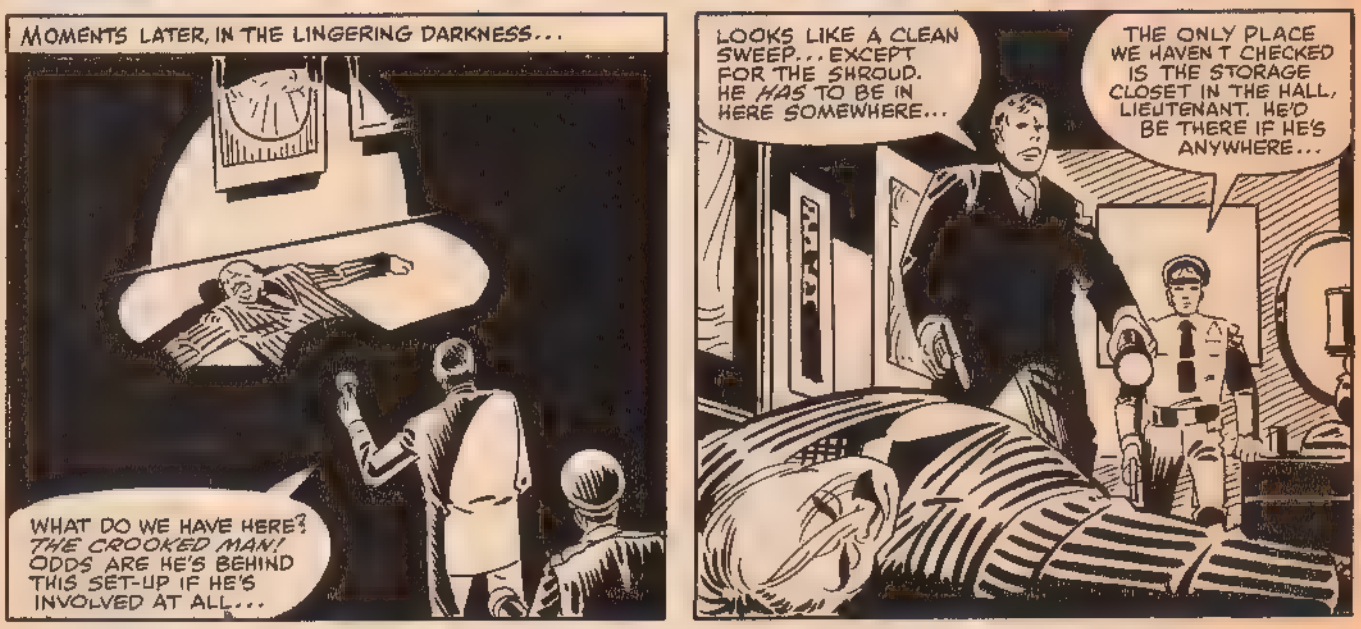
AS THE SHROUD SPEAKS, A NEARBY PATCH OF DARKNESS SHIVERS AND RECEDES--
--REVEALING...
HE'S A BIT SHAKEN, JACOBY, BUT OTHERWISE UNHARMED. THE PAINTINGS ARE IN YOUR OFFICE
LANCE!
GET HIM OUT OF HERE... THERE'S GOING TO BE TROUBLE!
TROUBLE? B-BUT THERE'S NO ONE ELSE HERE BUT BUMS...
BUMS... AND POLICEMEN DISGUISED AS BUMS!
WHAT? HOW DID YOU KNOW--OOOF!
VERY LITTLE ESCAPES MY MYSTIC SENSES, OFFICER!
OVER HERE! SOMEONE HELP ME!
TOK!
I'VE GOT HIM, LIEUTENANT!
HUH? THE NET IS FALLING RIGHT THROUGH HIM!
THAT DARKNESS-SHAPING ILLUSION WORKED WELL. MY CONTROL OVER THE SHADOWS IS GETTING STRONGER!
WHAT HAPPENED TO CAT AND MOUSE? THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO PICK ME UP BY NOW. COULD THE POLICE HAVE FOUND OUR GET-AWAY CAR?

HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO FIND THIS SHROUD? I CAN'T TELL BETWEEN REAL DARKNESS AND THE STUFF HE MAKES?
I SEE HIM! OVER HERE!
THIS IS NO GOOD! THE POLICE ARE SWARMING ALL OVER ME... AND I CAN'T BLACK OUT THE WHOLE AREA...
I'M TRAPPED...
BLAM!
SUDDENLY...
HUH? THIS AREA SHOULD BE CLOSED TO TRAFFIC!
HONK! HONK!
WE'RE IN TIME, BABY! THERE'S THE SHROUD!
WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?
HONK!
THE CROOKED MAN TOLD US NOT TO COME BACK-- BUT WE COULDN'T RUN OUT ON YOU, BROTHER! WE'RE PARTNERS!
THERE THEY GO, LT. BERG! I CAN STILL--
DON'T FIRE, MAN! IT'S TOO DARK! WE CAN'T BE SURE OF WHAT WE'RE AIMING AT! THEY'VE GOTTEN AWAY!
HMMM... I HAVE A TRICK TO PLAY ON THE CROOKED MAN, TOO... IF YOU'LL GO ALONG WITH ME!
THAT'S FUNNY... I COULD SWEAR THERE'S A... TRAIL OF DARKNESS BEHIND THAT CAR! GET THE MEN TOGETHER, SERGEANT! WE'RE GOING AFTER THEM!

TWENTY MINUTES LATER, AT THE MANSION HIDEOUT OF THE CROOKED MAN...
CAT! MOUSE! I WAS WORR ED ABOUT YOJ MY CHILDREN...DID ALL GO AS I HAD ARRANGED?
EVERY LAST DETAIL, CROOKED MAN! HERE'S THE MONEY!
AND THE SHROUD?
COPS GOT HIM. SHOT HIM DOWN WHILE HE WAS TRYING TO ESCAPE.
EXCELLENT! YOU DID WELL MY FRIENDS! DO NOT MOURN FOR THE SHROUD-- HE DESERVED HIS DEATH!
A MAN OF HIS POWER COULD DESIRE NOTHING LESS THAN TO WREST MY OPERATION FROM ME! LET THIS BE A LESSON TO YOJ ALL-- THE PRIZE IS MINE, AND THE SHROUD IS--
OH, NO...
YES, CROOKED MAN! I'VE COME TO DESTROY YOU!
HAVE AT HIM, MEN! MEN?
THE CROOKED MAN IS NUTS! HE CAN'T PAY ME ENOUGH TO FIGHT THAT CAPED MANIAC AGA N!
THE BOSS CAN TACKLE THE SHROUD HIMSELF-- IT'LL GIVE US TIME TO GET OUTTA HERE!
HOLY--! COPS! HE MUSTA KNOWN THEY WERE COM.N'! THAT'S WHY HE LET US GET AWAY!
WRRREE!

WE ARE THE ONLY ONES LEFT, CROOKED MAN! WHERE IS YOUR BLUSTER NOW?
SHOW YOURSELF! ARE YOU AFRAID TO FACE ME?
AFRAID? OF YOU?
YOU PRATTLE ON ABOUT ART, CROOKED MAN-- BUT THERE IS NO ART IN CRIME! YOU ARE A SHAM, A DELUDED, PRETENTIOUS FOOL! HOW COULD I FEAR YOU?
SILENCE! YOU ARE THE CHARLATAN-- AND YOU ARE HUMAN ENOUGH TO BE STOPPED BY A BULLET!
AH...
REVERTING TO TYPE, CROOKED MAN? WHAT STYLE... ACTING LIKE ANY STREET HOOD WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN!
BE SILENT! YOU CAN'T TALK TO ME LIKE THAT! I'M THE CROOKED MAN!
HA! HA! HA! HA! HA!
BLAM!
THE CROOKED MAN!

THE POLICE ARE COMING, CROOKED MAN. YOU'LL HAVE TO PUT UP A BETTER FIGHT IF YOU WANT TO GET AWAY.
NO...IT ISN'T POSSIBLE!
THAT SHOT WAS POINT-BLANK! I WAS STANDING RIGHT NEXT TO YOU...
I COULDN'T HAVE MISSED! I COULDN'T HAVE!
STAY AWAY FROM ME, SHROUD!
STAY A..
THOK!


MOMENTS LATER, IN THE LINGERING DARKNESS...
WHAT DO WE HAVE HERE? THE CROOKED MAN! ODDS ARE HE'S BEHIND THIS SET-UP IF HE'S INVOLVED AT ALL...
LOOKS LIKE A CLEAN SWEEP... EXCEPT FOR THE SHROUD. HE HAS TO BE IN HERE SOMEWHERE...
THE ONLY PLACE WE HAVEN'T CHECKED IS THE STORAGE CLOSET IN THE HALL, LIEUTENANT. HE'D BE THERE IF HE'S ANYWHERE...

NO TRICKS, SHROUD! COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS--
--NOTHING!
HOW?! THE BUILDING WAS CORDONED OFF AND THOROUGHLY SEARCHED! HOW DID HE GET OUT! HOW?
THIS ROUND GOES TO YOU, SHROUD! I'LL NAB YOU THE NEXT TIME WE MEET... AND, SOMEHOW, I DOUBT THAT WILL BE LONG IN COMING...

IN THE MEANTIME, I'LL SETTLE FOR THIS CATCH! LET'S GO, CROOKED MAN!
WHERE'S MY LAWYER? I WANT MY LAWYER!
YOU CAN CALL HIM FROM THE STATION HOUSE! NOW MOVE!
FOOTSTEPS ECHO DOWN THE HALL. SOON THE DECREPIT MANSION IS STILL.
THEN, EMERGING FROM THE SHADOWED CLOSET...
I THOUGHT WE'D HAD IT WHEN THAT COP SHINED HIS FLASH-LIGHT ON US. WHY DIDN'T HE SEE US?
MY DARKNESS CANNOT BE PIERCED BY ANY LIGHT, CAT!
WELL, THANKS FOR SAVING US, MAN I WASN'T KEEN ON SEEING THE INSIDE OF A JAIL.
I DIDN'T DO IT FROM THE GOODNESS OF MY HEART.
I CRIPPLED THE CROOKED MAN'S OPERATION-- BUT I WANT SOMETHING ELSE, TOO. I SPARED YOU TWO, BECAUSE YOU HAVE TALENTS I CAN USE.
I NEED PEOPLE WHO CAN MOVE IN CRIMINAL CIRCLES-- PEOPLE I CAN TRUST. I PLAN TO OVERTHROW ALL THE GANGS IN LOS ANGELES, UNTIL NONE ARE LEFT BUT MINE. WILL YOU HELP ME?
YOU DON'T STRIKE ME AS THE CRIME BOSS TYPE, MAN-- BUT, HEY-- I'D RATHER BE WITH YOU THAN AGAINST YOU!
I LIKE THE WAY YOU OPERATE, SHROUD. COUNT ME IN!
A TOAST THEN, WITH THIS FINE VINTAGE WINE I FOUND IN THE CROOKED MAN'S LARDER.
HERE'S TO CRIME!
AND SO BEGINS THE SHROUDS SECRET WAR AGAINST THE UNDERWORLD-- A BATTLE WAGED FROM WITHIN!
END.

Letters

Gents,

Since its initial conception, MARVEL PREVIEW has been primarily an experimental magazine. To wit:

MARVEL PREVIEW
- #1 — MAN-GODS FROM BEYOND THE STARS
- #2 — THE PUNISHER
- #3 — BLADE
- #4 — STAR-LORD
- #5 — SHERLOCK HOLMES
- #6 — SHERLOCK HOLMES
- #7 — SATANA
- #8 — LEGION OF MONSTERS
- #9 — MAN-GOD
- #10 — THOR THE MIGHTY
- #11 — STAR-LORD
- #12 — HAUNT OF HORROR
- #13 — UFO CONNECTION
- #14 — STAR-LORD
- #15 — STAR-LORD
- #16 — MASTERS OF TERROR
- #17 — BLACKMARK
- #18 — STAR-LORD
- #19 — KULL THE DESTROYER

It has experimented with horror (#s 3, 7, 8, 12, & 16), science fiction (#s 1, 4, 7, 10, 13 15, & 18), adventure and legend (#s 2, 9, 10, 17, & 19), and — on occasion — mystery (#s 5, 6, & 16). It has had outright successes and downright failures. Always daring, it has never been consistent. But it has always intrigued me — as have its sister titles MARVEL PREMIERE and MARVEL SPOTLIGHT — though its constant experimentation, as the above numbers game aptly shows, has been erratic.

Looking at four issues that — for me, at least — succeeded shows how the game of experimentation works. Those issues — #s 11, 13, 17, & 18 — are very even and everything flows as a unit. Issues #13 and #18 show it best. The UFO CONNECTION had an excellent and highly original script that did not sacrifice characterization for action's sake, in combination with good artwork and interesting — if not intriguing — articles. Likewise, the latest STAR-LORD had good stories and art, with the ever-popular consistent flow.

The latest issue failed for me because it should have been an issue of SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN. KULL and SOLOMON KANE have appeared in SAVAGE SWORD before, so why bother with the PREVIEW appearance?

Be that as it may, what does the future hold. I, of course, have some suggestions:

1) The reappearance of SHERLOCK HOLMES, this time around with an infallible art team like Colan and Palmer or Miller and Janson.

2) MOON KNIGHT

3) A return of THE PUNISHER (with DOMINIC FORTUNE along for the ride, as well).

4) A Marvel mystery/horror issue, done up properly, if you'd be so kind. With the return of Hodiah Twist, you could feature some of the new up-and-coming graphic talent (Miller, Zeck, Sienkiewicz, Bissettte, *et al*) on some well written original stories or adaptations (Stephen King, Robert Block, *etc*.)

5) A detective issue.

6) A western issue, featuring either CALEB HAMMER or some such hard-bitten spaghetti western type

7) STAR-LORD, of course.

Gerard Ashworth
45/1 Addison Road
Sydney, Australia

Many thanks for your multi-page critique, Ger. We're just sorry that we had to edit down some of the commentary — spacial limitation, you know — but we found it all to be most intriguing.

As you point out, PREVIEW has been a magazine of experimentation... and we wouldn't have it any other way. You're right that the magazine has not been that consistent, but we're really at a loss on how to preserve any issue-to-issue consistency when we may present a horror theme one issue, and a science fiction saga the next. However, we do recognize the need for a consistent feel — or flow, as you put it — within each issue, and we're doing our best to keep that in mind.

Now, *vis-a-vis* your suggestions...

While there are no plans ar present for any future Sherlock Holmes stories, you presently hold the MOON KNIGHT issue in your hands. (And we're proud to say that plans are now underway, at this writing, to give the Cresent Crusader his own monthly color comic... with the Moench/Sienkiewicz team at the helm, naturally.)

Likewise, there are no plans for more PUNISHER issues... *but* DOMINIC FORTUNE lives again — in full Marvel-color — in the back of THE HULK magazine! Howard Chaykin and Denny O'Neil make up the brain trust on FORTUNE.

STAR-LORD is set to be featured in MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #6 and #7, as Peter Quill and Ship star in a brace of seventeen-page stories by Doug Moench and Tom Sutton. And after that — ?

And as far as breaking ground with new genres goes... well, MARVEL PREVIEW #22's adventures of MERLIN by Moench, Buscema, and Palmer will be followed by an issue that is so *outre*, that we're not exactly sure how to describe it. It really defies attempts at labeling or pigeonholing. We can tell you that it combines the talents of Denny O'Neil, Gene Colan, Steve Skeates, Alfredo Alcala, Roger Stern, Bob McLeod, and a cast of dozens. More than that, we cannot say... just yet.

Dear People,

I just bought and read MARVEL PREVIEW #19, featuring KULL THE DESTROYER, and I am impressed. I'd never picked up a copy of PREVIEW before,but I was drawn to this issue because I'm a KULL fan from 'way back. I must say that you guys did a good job

"Riders Beyond the Sunrise" was a great yarn. Finally we get to see King Kull defeating .. killing... the wizard Thulsa Doom in battle! Roy Thomas' scripting of the tale was, as usual, very good. And Sal Buscema and Tony DeZuniga did a good job, too I especially liked their full-page shot of Kull standing alone, looking down from the mountain.

The only problem I had with the story is that I can't for the life of me figure out how it fits in with the end of issue #16 of the late KULL THE DESTROYER series. In that issue, the Woman in the Moon comes down to Kull and gives him a vision of his future. At the end of that vision, he sees himself fighting Thulsa Doom, and being slain... even though the wizard is using none of his sorcery. Now, did I miss something between KULL #16 and PREVIEW #19 that would clarify this? Or was the Moon-Woman just something conjured up by Thulsa Doom himself? Or could the evil wizard come back to life yet again, sometime in the future? Oh, well... enough of that. I really enjoyed the story, and I'd definitely like to see some more.

The comics chronology — "The Tiger of Atlantis" — was good, as well as informative. It's something that's been needed for quite a while. You might add to the chronology the story "Kings of the Night," in which Kull goes forward in time to meet Bran Mak Morn, and fight on the side of the Picts, Britons and Gaels, leading a group of savage Northmen against the Roman Legions. This story appeared in the SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #42-43, and was most likely published too late to make it into the chronology.

The Kull Portfolio by John & Marie Severin was nice, and it had some very dramatic scenes. The Solomon Kane tale, "The Footfalls Within," was exciting, too

I usually stick to buying SAVAGE SWORD and CONAN THE BARBARIAN, but I'd be more than happy to buy future issues of MARVEL PREVIEW if they featured KULL. How about giving some thought to reviving the black-and-white KULL AND THE BARBARIANS?

As for future issues of PREVIEW — besides the previously suggested KULL stories — how about a RED SONJA feature? It seems to be a logical choice. PREVIEW could even serve as a testing ground to see if she should get her own magazine.

Well, thanks for your time. KULL was great; just keep it up.

Jeff Boyle
7772 Illahee Road NE
Bremerton, WA 98310

To be honest, Jeff, we don't know if the Woman in the Moon was showing Kull a possible future or one that – for him — is yet to happen. Thulsa Doom *is* a pretty resourceful wizard, and even though his end looked extremely permanent, we wouldn't rule out his return for a bout with Kull. We'll just have to wait and see...

Well, that's it for now, people!

We hope you'll all be here next issue to partake of all the pageantry, sorcery, and adventure of MERLIN, and epic tale set in the Court of King Arthur.. imagineered by Doug Moench, John Buscema, and Tom Palmer!

In the meantime, we await your comments on this issue's tale of the mysterious Moon Knight... and that slightly supernatural denizen of the night, the Shroud! As always, all notes, missives, and silver crescents should be sent winging their way to:

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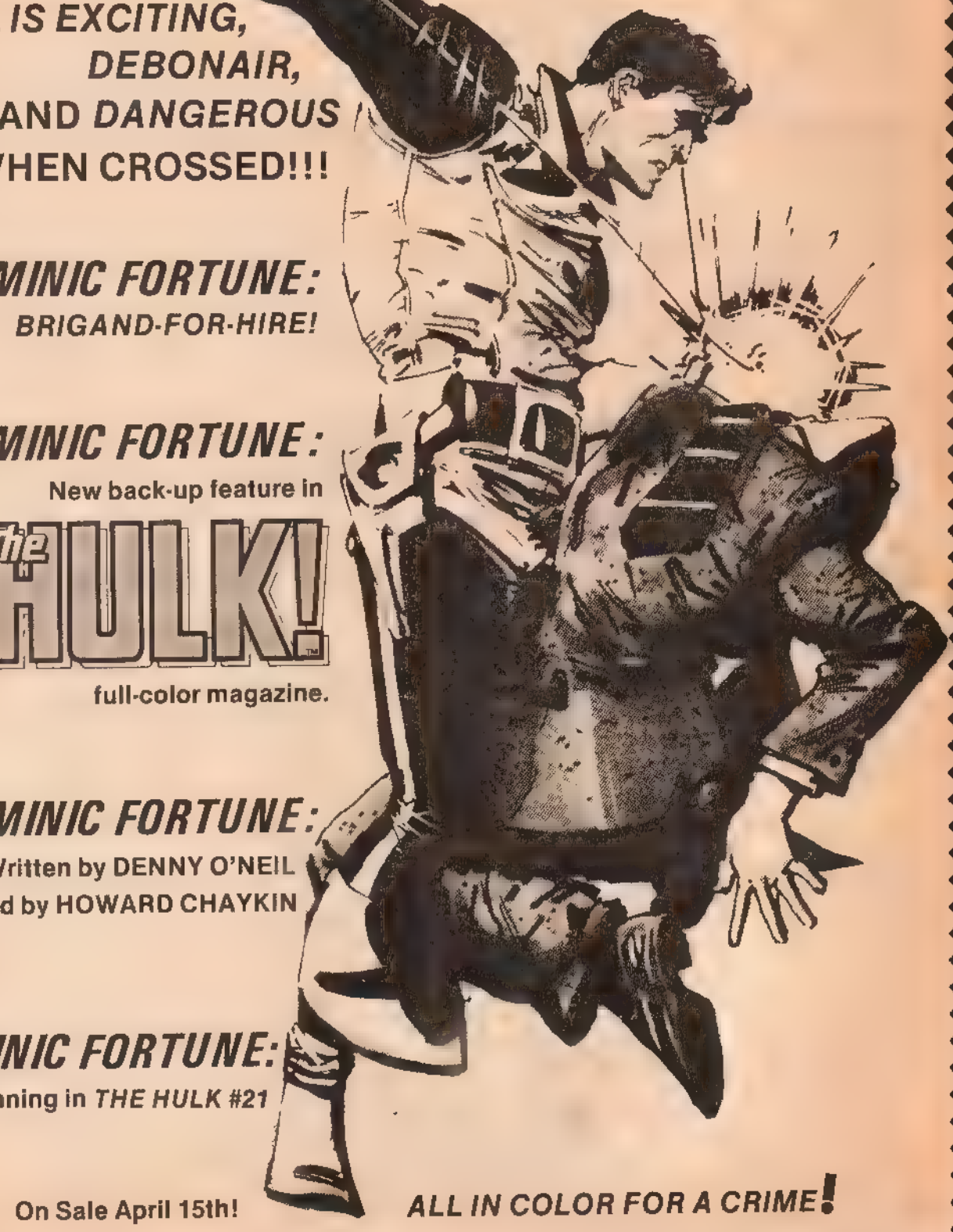

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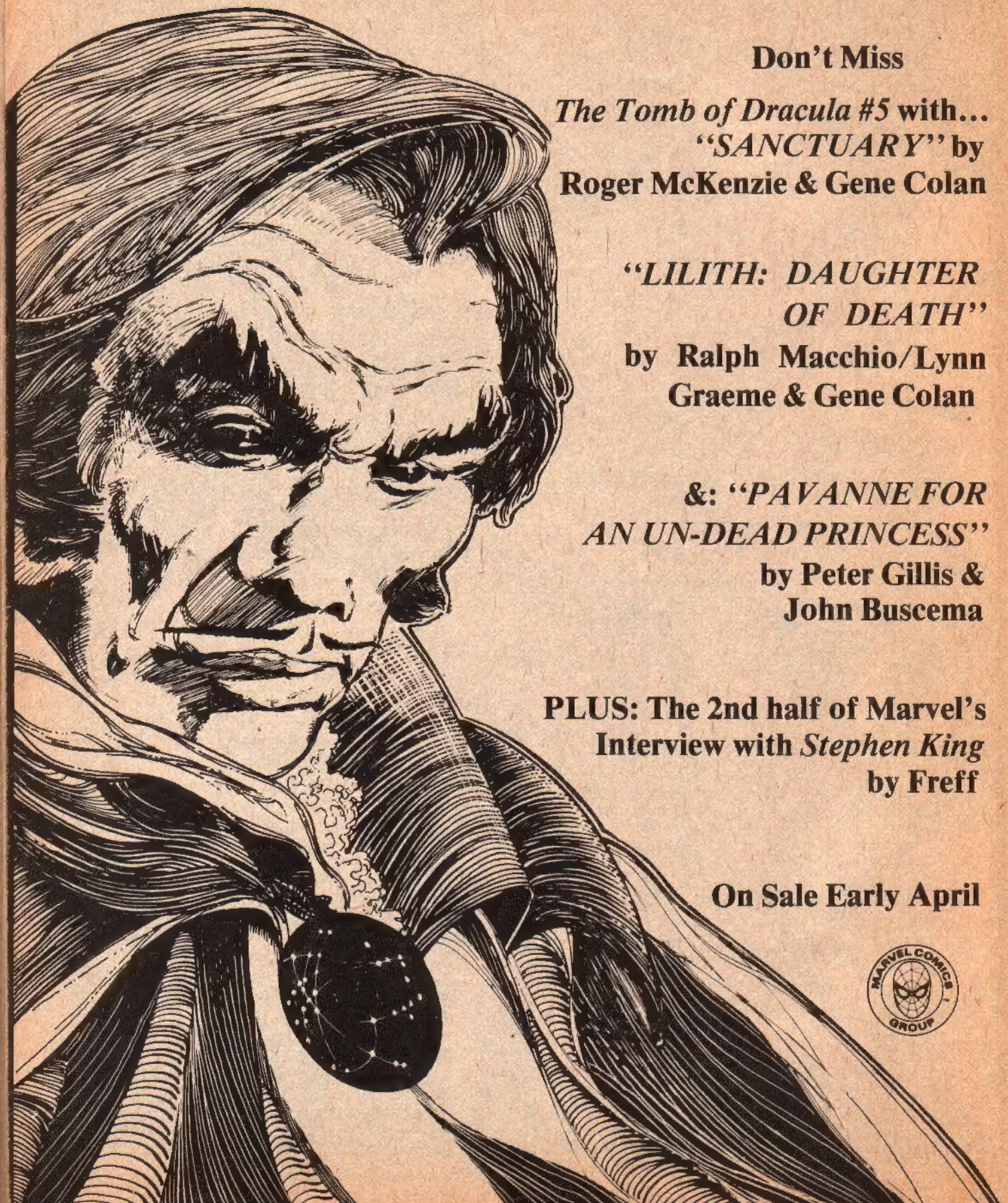

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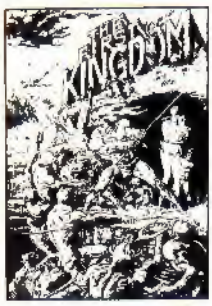

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